MR LLOYD GEORGE AND THE WAR

WALTER ROCH

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MR LLOYD GEORGE AND THE WAR

RIGHT HON. DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

Frontispiece

MR LLOYD GEORGE AND THE WAR

BY

WALTER ROCH

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR PEMBROKESHIRE
FROM 1908 TO 1918

Some said, John, print it ; others said, Not so ;
Some said, It might do good ; others said, No.

AUTHOR'S APOLOGY, *Pilgrim's Progress*

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1920

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PART I

THE ARMED PEACE

"When this war broke out, we were on better terms with Germany than we had been for fifteen years. There was not a man in the Cabinet who thought that war with Germany was a possibility under the present conditions."—*Mr. Lloyd George's Speech at the City Temple, November* 9, 1914.

"Look at it from any point of view you like, and I say you will come to this conclusion in regard to the relations between England and Germany: that there is no real cause of difference between them, and although there may be snapping and snarling in the newspapers, and in the London clubs, those two great peoples have nothing to fight about, have no prize to fight for, and have no place to fight in."—*Mr. Winston Churchill: Speech at Swansea, August* 15, 1908.

CHAPTER I

THE ARMED PEACE

I

MR. LLOYD GEORGE cannot be included in the number of those who foretold, or even of those who foresaw, either the probability or the possibility of war with Germany. Some day, perhaps, when knowledge has grown, and diplomatic archives are available, the story of our relations with Germany, for the past twenty or thirty years, will be told by the historical section of the League of Nations. But meanwhile, in order to appreciate the views which Mr. Lloyd George held and expressed between 1906 and 1914, it is necessary to summarise with such information as is available, and sometimes with almost stenographic shortness, some phases of those relations which culminated in the outbreak of war in August of 1914.

While it is difficult to fix a precise date which shows the beginning of a new tendency, or of a definite change of policy, nevertheless, it really does seem that on the retirement of Bismarck on March 20, 1890, an epoch came to an end; that from that date, the friendship between Germany and ourselves steadily cooled, and that a new era of foreign politics in Europe had begun. From the date of the Congress of Berlin up to 1890, though between those dates Treitschke was preaching that Great Britain was the enemy, there was little serious friction between the two Empires. Both British foreign policy and public interest were concentrated on the Afghan frontier, and on the maintenance of our Colonial Empire against Russia and France; and in 1890 Lord Salisbury, a firm friend of the Triple Alliance, had no difficulty in ceding Heligoland, and selling a strip of the East African coast, to Germany, in exchange for Zanzibar, Uganda, and an agreed frontier to Northern East Africa.

Bismarck's resignation, largely due to a difference on foreign policy between the young Emperor and himself, was followed by a diplomatic Convention between Russia and France in 1891, and

a military Convention in 1892, which matured into the Franco-Russian Alliance in 1894, triumphantly proclaimed to the world, when Nicholas II and President Faure exchanged toasts on August 23, 1897. The text of the military Convention, which was only published in 1918, provided that if France were attacked by Germany, or by Italy with Germany's support, Russia would employ all her available forces against Germany; and that if Russia were attacked by Germany, or by Austria with Germany's support, France would employ all her available forces against the same enemy; that if the forces of the Triple Alliance, or one of them, were mobilised, France and Russia were to mobilise immediately all their forces, and transport them as near the frontiers as possible; France and Russia agreed not to conclude peace separately; that the Convention was to have the same duration as the Triple Alliance, and that all its clauses were to be "kept strictly secret." And it is curious to note, in the light of subsequent events, that British public opinion, at the time, did not approve of these arrangements, which were looked upon as an alliance between our two principal rivals and as an adjustment of the balance in Europe to our detriment.

On the other hand, the relations between France and ourselves led repeatedly to serious friction: the French rights to maintain fisheries along the "French Coast" had been met by our granting a self-governing charter to Newfoundland. The Newfoundland Parliament legislated with complete disregard of French "rights." We, naturally, could not interfere with the autonomy of a self-governing colony. We were also, somewhat tactlessly, reminded that we had repeatedly promised to evacuate Egypt—some day. When Sir Herbert Kitchener and Colonel Marchand faced each other in the little Soudanese village of Fashoda the two countries were on the brink of war.

Fortunately France was not prepared for war, added to which the British Navy made it difficult to land a single French soldier in Egypt. Colonel Marchand marched away, declaring at Cairo, on his way home, that the day might come when France would be supreme in the valley of the Nile; M. Hanotaux resigned and was succeeded at the Foreign Office by M. Delcassé.

It is strange how little we know in this country of M. Delcassé. Yet his real personality must be almost as interesting as that of the Kaiser. Prince Bülow has described him as "a most gifted and energetic statesman, but too easily swayed by his feelings where Germany was concerned." He enjoyed the personal

friendship of King Edward. Although, as a rule, foreign secretaries in France come and go with bewildering rapidity, he retained his post in no less than five Administrations from 1899 to 1905. In those years he made history, not only for France, but for us as well. And yet he is one of the "mystery men" of Europe. How far did he control events, and to what extent did events control him? Did he deliberately prepare for the inevitable war with Germany, and did he patiently spin his web of ententes and agreements with this definite object in view? Did he ever explore the possibility of an understanding with Germany? Did he, of set purpose, prepare the way for an armed alliance with us? Diplomatic archives will one day answer.

Having settled the difference which had arisen with us at Fashoda, he turned his attention elsewhere. For many years the relations between France and Italy had been hostile. Italy had always looked on the reversion to Tunis as her own, and, with the deliberate object of keeping France and Italy apart, Bismarck had encouraged the annexation of Tunis by France in 1881. The two countries were distracted by tariff wars. M. Delcassé proceeded to liquidate this quarrel, and by 1902 he was able to sign the first of his ententes. The details of this agreement have not yet been published, but there is no reason to doubt that it included an understanding between France and Italy, both with regard to Tripoli and Morocco. In fact, Italy had been neutralised as an effective member of the Triple Alliance. "En aucun cas et sous aucune forme," said M. Delcassé in the French Chamber on July 3, 1902, "l'Italie ne peut devenir ni l'auxiliaire, ni l'instrument d'une agression contre notre pays." The true inwardness of this entente was seen when, in 1912, Italy annexed Tripoli, when, in August 1914, Italy declined to march with the other members of the Triple Alliance, and the following year declared herself against them. What Prince Bülow had described as a *tour de valse* was not so brief or so platonic as it seemed at the time.

This done, M. Delcassé's restless eyes wandered across the Channel to find circumstances curiously favourable to his policy. When the Emperor William sent his famous telegram to President Kruger after the Jameson raid, the British public was seriously annoyed, but British naval officers only laughed. The threats of German intervention, with the German Navy as it then was, seemed to them almost a joke. There can be little doubt that his powerlessness to intervene then, and during the South African War, left a deep impression on the impressionable mind

of the Emperor. In 1898 Admiral Tirpitz became Secretary of State to the Navy Office, and the first German Naval Law promptly emerged, placing German naval policy on an entirely new footing, and making a formidable Navy a definite constituent part of the German political system.

This was followed in 1900 by a further naval law increasing the German Navy to thirty-four battleships, with a complement of reserves, cruisers, and torpedo-boats, and when the South African War was over Germany was well on the way to becoming the second naval Power of the world.

The South African War was not merely a military and colonial episode, it was an event in British history: it helped to create the German Navy. It had been opposed by a considerable section of public opinion at home, not merely as a matter of policy but on grounds of fundamental righteousness. It had shattered the Liberal Party. For a time it seemed to have drawn a permanent political dividing line between Liberalism and Imperialism, and to have driven the Liberal Imperialists out of the Liberal fold. The reaction to it ultimately created the unwieldy and anti-imperial Liberal majority which swept the country in the General Election of 1906. It ranged Europe with unanimity against us. Some day we shall know with what anxieties our Foreign Office then faced the possibilities of a hostile European Coalition. It left "splendid isolation" somewhat tarnished, and made the search for friends desirable if not necessary. This search seems to have been at times undecided, and even promiscuous, for, although on two occasions in 1900, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain publicly advocated an Anglo-German Alliance, there followed in quick succession the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902, King Edward's personal European tour in 1903, the tightening of the Russo-French Alliance, and finally, in 1904, the Entente Cordiale, arranged by M. Delcassé and Lord Lansdowne.

To the uninitiated world, informed only by the published texts, the Entente Cordiale was merely a gentlemanly liquidation of colonial differences between France and ourselves. Europe was never mentioned, publicly, and it was only in 1911, thanks to the enterprise of the Paris newspaper, "Le Matin," that the general public was able to learn that a "secret" annex contemplated the partition of Morocco by France, accompanied by the cession to Spain of part of the West North African Coast. And on October 3, 1904, M. Delcassé was able to announce that an entente, which gave effect to the secret annex, had been arrived at with Spain.

The triumph of French diplomacy was complete, and the moment seemed opportune for proposals which were then made for " Reform " in Morocco. But the Emperor of Morocco appealed to the German Government, the Kaiser landed at Tangier on March 31, and announced that, in his eyes, Abdul Aziz was an independent ruler. It is difficult not to connect the Kaiser's dramatic intervention with the fact that the Japanese victory at Liao Yang in 1904 had been followed by a crushing Russian defeat at Mukden in March 1905. It is reasonable, also, to suppose that the German Government was aware of the secret agreements with regard to Morocco. The German sabre was rattled with a vengeance, and France had to choose between war with Germany and the retirement of M. Delcassé. Two well-informed French writers, M. Tardieu and M. Lemonon, have expressed the opinion that, at this crisis, the British Government was prepared to give France armed support. But the real facts are veiled in secrecy. It was the first " test " of the Entente, and what our policy on that occasion was has not yet been divulged. If we were ready then to give France armed support, our Ministers' hearts must have been a good deal stronger than their heads. The French Army had not recovered from the " affaire Dreyfus," France itself was torn in twain by the fight between the clericals and the anti-clericals ; Russia was almost " down and out," as a result of the war with Japan, and it would be interesting to know what force our War Office could have landed on the Continent, and within what time. The German Army, needless to say, was ready.

Fate and events had been too hard for M. Delcassé, and France very wisely accepted, first the resignation of M. Delcassé, and then the Algeciras Conference.

In an article in the " Nation " of August 7, 1915, Lord Haldane expressed the opinion that the British, unlike the Germans, have not been in the habit of calling on their leaders " to think strenuously for them," and expressed surprise that " the public did not insist that the unrest of Europe should be the foremost subject of political consideration," and he added that " the democracy in this country was suffering from an indisposition to reflect, and in consequence was not disposed to listen to the few who preached." These remarks were, no doubt, applied more particularly to the years 1906–1914, and in the next chapter we shall endeavour to trace the development of policy which was carried out, not by the " few who preached," but by the few members " who knew "

in the Liberal Cabinet which was thrown up by the General Election of 1906.

II

"The British Government and the House of Commons from which it had sprung did not believe in the approach of a great war, and was determined to prevent it; but, at the same time, the sinister hypothesis was continually present in their thoughts, and was repeatedly brought to the attention of Ministers by disquieting incidents and tendencies. For nearly ten years this duality and discordance were the key-note of British politics, and those whose duty it was to watch over the safety of the country lived simultaneously in two different worlds of thought. There was the actual visible world, with its peaceful activities and cosmopolitan aims, and there was a hypothetical world—a world "beneath the threshold" as it were—a world at one moment utterly fantastic, and at the next seeming about to leap into reality—a world of monstrous shadows, moving in convulsive combinations through vistas of fathomless catastrophes."—*Mr. Winston Churchill, "Sunday Pictorial," June* 9, 1916.

In the early part of December of 1905 Mr. Balfour's Administration broke up, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was summoned to form a new one. The Liberal Party was then still divided by the differences which had arisen over the South African War, though a common platform had been found in resisting Mr. Chamberlain's fiscal proposals, and a general wish for unity prevailed. Despite this, the leading members of the Liberal League, Mr. Asquith, Sir Edward Grey, and Mr. Haldane, had been apprehensive that a sweeping Liberal victory, which seemed imminent whenever the General Election might come, would lead to a flood of ill-considered and ill-informed opinion, which they would be unable to resist. They were ready to accept Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as leader, but they wished for an arrangement which would make their influence predominant, under which he would go to the House of Lords, accompanied by Mr. Haldane as Lord Chancellor, leaving Mr. Asquith to lead in the Commons, with Sir Edward Grey at the Foreign Office. With this object in view, a defensive alliance between the three was entered into in September of 1905. Mr. Haldane acquainted King Edward with the situation, from whom the suggestion came that, in the event of his not being Lord Chancellor, sufficient scope for his activities might possibly be found at the War Office. Sir Henry, however, declined the suggested promotion. For some days there was considerable doubt as to whether Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Haldane would join the Administration, though ultimately their scruples were overcome.

On December 11 London was enveloped in a thick black fog, and on that day, as the superstitious noted, the names of the

members of the new Cabinet, a judicious mixture of Liberal Imperialists and other Liberals, were officially announced.

From their point of view, the fears of the Liberal Imperialists with regard to a large mass of crude Liberal opinion were amply justified. In 1906 the Liberal Party, with the exception of three years from 1892 to 1895, had passed almost a generation in opposition. In 1905 the long reign of Toryism and Imperialism seemed to have come to an end. The rank and file were filled with generous, if undefinable, emotions. Righteousness, aided by its handmaidens of peace, retrenchment and reform, was about to prevail at last.

On December 21 the campaign was inaugurated by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman at the Albert Hall, surrounded by his Cabinet, which was described by an enthusiastic Liberal Press as the " strongest Government of modern times."

> As to our general policy towards our neighbours, our general foreign policy, it will remain the same in government as it was in opposition. It will be opposed to aggression and to adventure, it will be animated by a desire to be on the best terms with all nationalities, and to co-operate with them in the common work of civilisation. . . .
>
> Ah, but ladies and gentlemen, it is vain, it is vain to seek peace if you do not also ensure it. I hold that the growth of armaments is a great danger to the peace of the world. A policy of huge armaments keeps alive and stimulates and feeds the belief that force is the best, if not the only, solution of international differences. It is a policy that tends to inflame old sores and to create new sores. And I submit to you that, as the principle of peaceful arbitration gains ground, it becomes one of the highest tasks of a statesman to adjust these armaments to the newer and happier condition of things.
>
> What nobler role could this great country assume than, at the fitting moment, to place itself at the head of a league of peace, through whose instrumentality this great work could be effected?

While the Prime Minister was thus vague and general, younger and fresher minds were clearer and more specific. " What dangers had they to fear in Europe? " said Mr. Runciman, then a junior minister, who afterwards filled various posts in the Cabinet with distinction, in the course of the subsequent election campaign. " Germany had been sobered by a democratic movement, which was a Free Trade movement, within her borders; Austria might show signs of disintegration, but she was not likely to fall under German influence. . . . So, with sober men to con-

duct our affairs, there was no fear of entanglement with the continent of Europe." And again: "In the army vote he wanted a reduction not of thousands, but of millions. . . . We required a regular army only for the frontier of India. . . . With sober men at our head, there was no reason why we should be entangled in continental discord." And thus spoke, and thus believed, with undoubted sincerity, and with some justification on the facts as they knew them, the great mass of the Liberal members who were returned. If the high gods take any real interest in politics, and have any ironic humour, they must have laughed during this election. For, in the very midst of it, while in one political stratum the country was echoing with the cries of "disarmament" and of "peace, retrenchment, and reform," in another and a deeper one, Sir Edward Grey, as he subsequently revealed to the House of Commons on August 3, 1914, was called upon to deal with the "first Moroccan crisis," and was asked by M. Cambon whether "if that crisis developed into war between France and Germany, we would give armed support," "armed support" meaning, of course, not only the assistance of the Navy but of a military force to assist in guarding the frontier opposite to Belgium. To which Sir Edward Grey replied that, in his opinion, if war were forced on France on the question of Morocco "public opinion in this country would rally to the material support of France," and, further, accepted M. Cambon's logical corollary that this hypothetical promise of support would be more effective, if and when this contingency arose, if some "conversations" were to take place between the British and French naval and military experts. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Mr. Asquith, and Mr. Haldane, but not the other members of the Cabinet, were made aware of what had passed between Sir Edward Grey and M. Cambon. "Conversations" followed with Colonel Huguet, the French Military Attaché; and Lord Haldane, Sir Neville Lyttelton, the Chief of the Staff, and General Grierson discussed matters confidentially with the French General Staff. The War Office was asked to ascertain what force we could send to the Continent, and within what time, in the event of an emergency, and the Army Council reported that not more than 80,000 men, or four divisions, after a delay too great to allow of their being of much value, in the modern continental conditions of mobilisation, could be transported across the Channel.

Fortunately the crisis passed. But the military conversations were continued, and, fortified by the knowledge acquired

during his visit to Berlin, and to the German War Office, in the summer of 1906, Lord Haldane proceeded to reorganise our own War Office, and create a real expeditionary force, and a second line army, in the shape of his Territorials, capable of expansion on modern principles, with the result that when another "Moroccan" crisis arose in 1911, he was in a position to place six divisions, and a cavalry division, on the Belgian frontier within thirteen days.

These military "conversations" throw a curious light, not only on the development of our high policy, but on our system of Cabinet government. They were not the subject of a Cabinet discussion, still less of a Cabinet decision. It is probably safe to say that they were not revealed, in their entirety, to the other members of the Cabinet until a similar crisis arose over Agadir in 1911. Yet they carried our policy more than a day's march along new and unknown roads to infinite possibilities. In picturesque language, which is quoted at the head of this section, Mr. Winston Churchill has drawn a vivid picture of the duality of worlds, "the actual visible world" and "the world 'beneath the threshold' as it were," in which the members of the Liberal Cabinet lived from 1906 to 1914. Cabinets, Liberal Cabinets possibly less than others, are seldom made up of entirely homogeneous elements. The Cabinet which came into being in 1906 was composed of two political strata, each following the trend of past differences, created by the South African War, and each still somewhat distrustful of the other.

In following the various actions and reactions through which it passed, the existence of these two strata must be borne constantly in mind: the upper stratum, visible, vocal, visionary, in which Mr. Lloyd George soon became the central, and Mr. Winston Churchill for a time a subsidiary figure, dreaming dreams of Hague Conferences, disarmament, social reform, and universal arbitration; the lower stratum, invisible, silent, executive, in which Mr. Asquith, Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Haldane lived, dealing with realities of which the upper stratum was only dimly aware.

III

The Conference at Algeciras produced, on April 7, 1906, the Act of Algeciras, which, in an elaborate code of no less than 123 clauses, and "In the Name of God Almighty," and "based upon the threefold principle of the sovereignty and independence of

His Majesty the Sultan, the integrity of his dominions and economic liberty without any inequality," established a state bank, police, and public works, and suppressed smuggling and illicit trading in arms, in effect tacitly recognising the French policy of "peaceful penetration." The storm had blown over for the time being; but the Conference showed clearly the new diplomatic groupings which were in progress of formation, and marked a steady deterioration in the German diplomatic position. The British representative, naturally, voted consistently with the French delegates. But in addition, during the Conference, British and Russian diplomats, for the first time, worked harmoniously together, and Belgium began to drift away from Germany and towards France and Britain. Italy was singularly detached. And the tendencies which the Conference revealed became manifest when, in August of 1907, after sixty years of hostility, an Anglo-Russian Entente was completed, by which differences in Tibet and Afghanistan were adjusted, and, more remarkable still, Persia was partitioned, under the guise of British and Russian "spheres of influence." It was obvious that differences in Asia were being liquidated in the light of contingencies in Europe. The German Press was even forced to note that an English princess was preferred to a German to share the throne of Spain!

The "first Moroccan crisis," however, while it produced action in one direction, was succeeded by reaction in another. While the lower political stratum was taking very definite shape and direction, the upper stratum was moving too, and for a time carrying the lower stratum along. In 1906 and 1907 King Edward visited the Kaiser. In November of 1907 the Kaiser went to Windsor Castle to return these compliments. In the course of this visit, largely as a result of personal conversations between the Kaiser and Mr. Haldane, it looked for a moment as though Anglo-German relations might enter on a better phase, thanks to agreement with regard to the Baghdad Railway. British interests required a "gate" to protect India from troops coming down the new railway, and a terminus on the Persian Gulf. The Kaiser was ready to give the "gate" and the terminus, and this fact was communicated to Mr. Haldane, while still in his bed, by a helmeted guardsman of the Kaiser's suite. This created some little stir at the Foreign Office, and ultimately it was agreed that there should be a Conference in Berlin, on the subject of the Baghdad Railway, between Britain, France, Russia, and Germany. But ultimately the proposal fell through. While Ger-

many was ready to discuss with us the question of the "gate," she did not desire to bring France and Russia into the Conference. It is probable that Prince Bülow did not wish to give the new Triple Entente the opportunity of a little diplomatic practice, or a lesson in diplomatic team work.

The upper stratum was also moving in another direction. Both in 1907 and 1908 the British naval programme was retarded in response to pressure from the Liberal majority in the House of Commons, and certain influences inside the Cabinet, in the hope that this would meet with a corresponding reciprocity in the German naval laws.

And its momentum was accelerated by the fact that it was soon to find in Mr. Lloyd George its expression and its leader. By 1908 he had been one of the conspicuous successes of the Government at the Board of Trade. He had become Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Government which was reconstructed on the death of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. He was the hope of the preponderating Radical majority in the House of Commons. In him was embodied the faith of the same majority in the new world of social development, and the new era of peace, retrenchment, and reform which had figured so largely in their election speeches. His speech, therefore, delivered under the auspices of the Peace Society at the Queen's Hall, on July 28, deserves consideration, not only as an expression of his own views, but as symbolic of the faith and hope of quite two-thirds of the Liberal Party of the day. The speech itself is a passionate plea for the diversion of the millions spent on armaments to the more fruitful channels of social reform. It expresses, in popular language, the orthodox Radical view of war scares in the past, of the inauguration of the Dreadnought, and the correct interpretation of the view and attitude of Germany.

I want to put two considerations to you from the German point of view. . . . Men have not got the imagination to project themselves into the position of the other party. Now just consider for a moment. You say, "Why should Germany be frightened of us? Why should she build because of us?" Let me put two considerations to you. We started it; it is not they who have started. We had an overwhelming preponderance at sea which could have secured us against any conceivable enemy. We were not satisfied, we said: "Let there be Dreadnoughts." . . . . Well, let me put another consideration before you which I don't think is sufficiently pointed out. We always say we must have what we call a "two-Power standard." What does that mean? You must have a Navy large

enough to oppose a combination of any two naval Powers. So, if we had Russia and France, Germany and France, Germany and Italy, we should always have a fleet large enough to defend our shores against any combination of the two greatest naval Powers in Europe. This has been our standard.

Look at the position of Germany. Her Army is to her what our Navy is to us—her sole defence against invasion. She has not got a two-Power standard. She may have a stronger Army than France, than Russia, than Italy, than Austria, but she is between two great Powers who, in combination, could pour in a vastly greater number of troops than she has. Don't forget that when you wonder why Germany is frightened at alliances and understandings and some sorts of mysterious workings which appear in the Press and hints in the "Times" and "Daily Mail." . . . Here is Germany in the middle of Europe, with France and Russia on either side, and with a combination of armies greater than hers. Suppose we had had a possible combination which would lay us open to invasion—suppose Germany and France, or Germany and Austria, had fleets which, in combination, would be no stronger than ours. Would we not be frightened, would we not build, would not we arm? Of course we should. I want our friends, who think that because Germany is a little frightened she really means mischief to us, to remember that she is frightened for a reason which would frighten us under the same circumstances.

To this appreciation of the German position there was added the suggestion of an Anglo-German Entente ("we have done it with France, we have done it with Russia, we have done it with the United States of America") and an appeal for a moral warfare with "worse enemies to fight than Germany" in terms which became from thence on generally familiar on Liberal platforms.

It is interesting also to note that a month later, in a speech at Swansea on August 15, Mr. Winston Churchill, then a comparatively recent convert from Free Trade Unionism, testified to the complete nature of his conversion, and the robust character of his faith, by expressing somewhat similar hopes of a better German understanding in somewhat more sonorous language.

I say . . . . there is no collision of primary interests between Great Britain and Germany in any quarter of the globe . . . there is no real cause of difference . . . they have nothing to fight about, have no prize to fight for, and have no place to fight in.

. . . I say that we honour that strong, patient, industrious German people, who have been for so many centuries divided, a prey to European intrigue, and a drudge among the nations of the Continent. . . . We rejoice in everything that brings them good; we wish them well from the

bottom of our hearts, and we believe most firmly the victories they will win in science and in learning against barbarism, against waste, the victories they will gain will be victories in which we shall share and which, while benefiting them, will also benefit us.

While in October of the same year, Mr. Lewis Harcourt asserted, "with knowledge and a deep sense of responsibility," that Anglo-German relations, "commercial, colonial, political, and dynastic have at no period during the last ten or fifteen years been on a firmer and more friendly footing than they are to-day."

But, side by side with this trilogy of speeches, things were happening again in Morocco and elsewhere. In September the German Consul at Casablanca attempted to help six deserters from the French Foreign Legion to escape. The deserters were recognised on their way to a German ship in the harbour, some French officers interfered, and in the course of their "interference" the German Consul's walking-stick was broken. Germany demanded an apology which France was unwilling to give, and for a moment it looked as if there was going to be a "second Moroccan crisis." However, to the delight of international jurists, the aid of the Hague Tribunal was sought, which tactfully sentenced both France and Germany to apologise to each other for the undue excitement displayed by their servants. The good feeling thus engendered led to some "business" conversations, and on February 9, 1909, a "Moroccan agreement" was signed by France and Germany, under which France reiterated her "firm attachment to the maintenance of the independence and integrity of the Shereefian Empire and promised "to safeguard the principle of economic equality"; while Germany, in return, declared that her sole interests in Morocco were commercial and that she would not impede "the special political interests of France" which were "closely bound up with the consolidation of order and internal peace."

Meanwhile, on July 23, Enver Bey had proclaimed the revolution of the Young Turks at Salonika, marched on Constantinople with two Army Corps (whose arrears of pay had been found from "somewhere"), and put an end to the old *régime*. In their first flush of enthusiasm for constitutional government the Young Turks, whose knowledge of the Treaty of Berlin was probably imperfect, proposed that the two provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina should return members to the Turkish Parliament. This democratic adventure was too much for the Emperor Franz Josef,

who also wished to celebrate his Diamond Jubilee in a fitting manner, and on October 7, the formal annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Austrian Empire was announced. And, as the new Turkish Government seemed fully occupied, King Ferdinand of Bulgaria, encouraged by Austria, took the opportunity to declare himself an independent Sovereign, and Crete proclaimed its union with Greece.

But the two provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina had a history. When preparing for war against Turkey in 1876, Russia had to protect a vulnerable "flank" against attack from Austria, and Austrian neutrality was secured by an agreement signed at Reichstadt in 1877. The actual details of this agreement have, of course, never been published; but it is safe to assume that Russia and Austria then agreed to restrict their "interests" to the eastern and western portions respectively of the Balkans, and that provision was made for the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria. Russia's victory over Turkey was followed by the Berlin Conference in 1878, and by the Treaty of Berlin, with which Lord Beaconsfield brought home "peace with honour." Under this treaty the Great Powers maintained the balance in Europe by restoring two-thirds of Bulgaria (which was then strongly pro-Russian) to Turkey, and placing Bosnia and Herzegovina under Turkish suzerainty and Austrian occupation. The Serbian dynasty was then pro-Austrian, and what the Great Powers had left of Bulgaria sat at the feet of Russia, who had delivered her. Dynasties and alliances are not, however, unduly permanent in South-Eastern Europe, and in the course of time the Serbians "changed" their pro-Austrian for a pro-Russian King, and Serbia took the place of Bulgaria as Russia's outpost in the Balkans. The inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina are Serbian Slavs, and since, after the Treaty of Berlin, nationalities had become more fashionable, particularly if their sympathies moved in the right direction, Serbia dreamt of including them in a greater Serbia. When, therefore, the annexation by Austria was proclaimed, Serbia appealed against it to the Tsar.

The annexation was, of course, a flagrant breach of the law of Europe. It produced a first-class European crisis, similar in nearly all its essentials to the crisis which ended in war in August of 1914. Russia demanded a European Congress, which Austria refused. The German Emperor, "in shining armour," stood by the side of Austria. Deutschtum triumphed, Slavdom was humiliated, for the Tsar gave way. "The group of Powers,"

wrote Prince Bülow, with complacent satisfaction, in his "Imperial Germany," "whose influence had been so much overestimated at Algeciras, fell to pieces when faced with the tough problems of Continental Policy. Italy sided with her Allies, France awaited events and assumed an attitude not unfriendly to Germany, and the Emperor Nicholas decided on a friendly settlement of the existing difficulties. The ingenious encirclement of Germany, for some time the terror of timid souls, proved to be a diplomatic illusion devoid of political actuality."

The only light which has been shed on the attitude then adopted by our Foreign Office was shed by Sir Edward Grey when he informed the House of Commons on August 4, 1914, that: "In 1908 there was a crisis, also a Balkan crisis, originating in the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Russian Ambassador, M. Isvolsky, came to London or happened to come to London, because his visit was planned before the crisis broke out. I told him definitely then, this being a Balkan crisis, a Balkan affair, I did not consider that public opinion in this country would justify us in promising to give anything more than diplomatic support. More was never asked from us, more was never given, and more was never promised." In fact, the new grouping of France, Russia, and ourselves was still a diplomatic skeleton to which general staffs could not yet give military flesh and blood. The Russian Army, which had not yet recovered from the Japanese defeat, was being reorganised with French assistance. We were giving similar advice to the Russian Fleet; the French Army was still suffering from the results of internal strife; our Entente with Russia did not yet appeal to the public imagination at home, and was necessarily strictly limited. The new group needed time.

With the close of this crisis in 1909 we reach a period when the storm of the "first Moroccan crisis" and the "first Balkan crisis" are succeeded by two years of comparative calm. It is well, therefore, to recapitulate the position as it then was.

Abroad we must mark the transformation of the diplomatic position of Germany, caused by these events, as compared with that which existed on the date of Bismarck's resignation. When Bismarck retired, in 1890, he left his country, not only unified within, but with authority unquestioned from without. The Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria, and Italy formed an all-powerful military *bloc*, strengthened by the "Reinsurance Treaty" which he had effected with Russia. The position in the Balkans was assured by an alliance with Rumania; Britain, though still

living in splendid isolation, was on the whole friendly to the Triple Alliance, and unfriendly both to Russia and France. In 1909 the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia had ceased; Russia and France were in close alliance, the British and French Entente had developed into a promise of armed British support in defence of French interests in Morocco; Britain and Russia had come together; Italy was an unstable member of the Triple Alliance. In short, of the whole of Bismarck's elaborate structure, only the alliance with Austria remained.

On the other hand, this new combination was, as yet, of greater diplomatic than military account, and we must note at home the existence of a Liberal majority in the House of Commons, dreaming pacific dreams, and seeing visions of a new Jerusalem, more interested in a Small Holdings Bill than in Mr. Haldane's reorganisation of the Army, insistent on drastic reductions in armaments, even in the Naval Estimates, largely unaware of and even wilfully blind to the change in continental relations which the new direction in British policy had produced. In the pressure exercised by this majority, strongly represented and reflected in the Cabinet, accentuated by the mystery which shrouded our high policy, is to be found the reason for the curious actions and reactions through which our policy passed, with almost monotonous regularity, and the explanation of why one policy, which led logically up to each crisis, was succeeded by feverish efforts towards another.

For, in truth, the years of tension through which Europe passed from 1906 to 1914 were years of political unreality and almost of political hypocrisy. It is possible to admit that during these years no country really wanted war, though each country desired the fruits and prestige of victory. The Kaiser wished for the spread of German influence and German culture, while, until 1913, the probability is that he did not in his heart wish to fight for them. For, if he did, he missed opportunities in 1906, in 1908, and even in 1911 which did not occur again. The Tsar was pacific, if only Slavdom could be exalted without war. We could have lived happily, but for the increase of the German Navy. And France could never forget Gambetta's words—"N'en parlons jamais, pensez-y toujours"—and not even the creation of a great North African Empire could make France forget the humiliation of 1870 or forgive the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. And the tension was increased by the secrecy of the "mystery men," and their power was enhanced by the fact that the interest of democracies being centred

on affairs at home, they were never forced to speak with frankness. (It is interesting to speculate on what the Liberal majority would have said and done in 1906 had it known of Sir Edward Grey's conversation with M. Cambon in January before the election was over.) Their activities during these years are even now imperfectly known. Europe lived in a world of whispers. And as, after each crisis, the whispers grew in volume, armaments grew also, staff appreciations were revised, calculations were recast, and the chances of war were estimated, accepted, declined, and estimated over again. These elements formed that lower political stratum of which the general public was only vaguely conscious, whose movement, sometimes accelerated, occasionally arrested, nearly always advancing, was carrying Europe along to its fate.

CHAPTER II

THE CRISIS OVER THE NAVY IN 1909

"Our fleet had to be built with an eye to English policy, and in this way it was built."
—*Prince Bülow, "Imperial Germany."*

I

THE preceding chapter brought our sketch of events up to the spring of 1909. An agreement between France and Germany with regard to Morocco had been reached, accompanied by an exchange of compliments and mutual expressions of hope and good-will for their future relations; the crisis over Bosnia and Herzegovina had been settled, at the expense of the public law of Europe, by recognising their annexation by Austria, on payment of a solatium of £2,200,000 to Turkey. For a moment it almost seemed that the Liberal Government at home might look forward to a period of calm, free from anxiety of "unrest" in Europe, and devote itself to the congenial task of social reform. But, in reality, only the stage accessories were changed, the upper and lower political strata, so marked a feature in the Liberal Cabinet, were still moving, and we have now to trace their movements in connection with our naval policy and naval programme for 1909.

The history of the world might have been different if the Kaiser had not been half English, and inherited a passion for the sea. For the German Navy is his creation. In 1898 its actual strength was seven ironclads fit for war, with three in course of construction, and a small complement of cruisers. It was, in fact, a negligible quantity, as had been shown by the derision with which the sending by the Kaiser of the famous Kruger telegram had been greeted, and could play no part in world affairs. But when, on June 28, 1897, on board the Royal Yacht *Hohenzollern* at Kiel, Bülow was appointed Chancellor of the German Empire, and, in the same year, Admiral von Tirpitz replaced Admiral Hollmann as Secretary of State at the Navy Office, the new policy began.

Already in March of 1898, the first German Navy Bill was

carried, in spite of opposition from the Social Democrats, the Radicals, and also from some of the "Centre." This Law provided for the building of seven additional battleships and additional cruisers. It fixed the number of vessels, of which the Navy was to consist, at seventeen battleships, with a reserve of two, and a corresponding body of cruisers. It also provided that the new vessels should be completed by the end of 1904, and, by limiting the effective life of the older ships, secured the supersession of out-of-date vessels by others of the newest type. This was, of course, only a modest beginning; it created a fleet, useful only for coastal defence and the protection of the Baltic Sea, but it placed German naval policy on an entirely new footing. "Up till then," according to Prince Bülow, "new ships had from time to time been demanded, and to some extent granted; but the Navy had lacked the solid foundation that the Army possessed in its absolutely definite constitution. By the limitation of the period of service of the ships on the one hand, and the determination of the number of effective ships on the other, the Navy became a definite constituent part of our national defence." This foundation was soon made still more solid. For though in 1899 Admiral Tirpitz had declared "expressly that in no quarter had the intention to submit a new navy plan in any way been manifested," circumstances helped him to realise his ambitions. In the course of the South African War a German mail steamer, the *Bundesrath*, and two other German merchant vessels were searched by the British Navy in the neutral waters of Delagoa Bay, and the agitation which resulted from this illustration of "sea-power" enabled Admiral Tirpitz to frame and carry a new Navy Bill in 1900.

The Navy Law of 1900 was of a formidable character. It doubled the size of the German Fleet, and for the first time included ships for battle purposes on the High Seas. And though its programme, fixing the establishment of the Fleet at thirty-eight battleships and twenty large cruisers, was only carried by omitting six large cruisers as a concession to the Centre, this reduction was made good by a further Naval Bill in 1906, which also increased the dimensions of the battleships, and, by fixing the effective life of a battleship at twenty-five years, and of a cruiser at twenty years, provided for the gradual supersession of obsolete vessels. Thus a battle fleet was created, consisting of two fleet flagships, four squadrons of eight large battleships, with four in reserve, and a full complement of large and small cruisers,

Germany was rapidly becoming the second naval Power in the world, and from 1907 onwards, all the Liberal sections in the Reichstag having united with the Conservatives in support of the Government, a parliamentary majority for any further increase in the Navy was assured.

These preparations were made under the shadow of the South African War, and, when peace was finally concluded with the Boer Republic, Britain was brought face to face with a new world and new conditions in Europe: a world in which a rude interloper seemed inclined to challenge a naval supremacy which had hitherto been accepted as axiomatic.

But while Germany had, in 1897, found in Admiral Tirpitz a man of talent, Britain was fortunate enough to find in 1904, in Admiral Sir John Fisher, a sailor of genius. Before Sir John Fisher became First Sea Lord the disposition of our Fleet was based on the theory that the Mediterranean was for us the decisive theatre of naval war. Amidst bitter opposition from a considerable section of the Navy, he soon effected a revolution: overseas squadrons were recalled, no less than a hundred ships were ruthlessly scrapped as obsolete, the Fleet was concentrated on the North Sea, new naval bases were put in hand at Rosyth and Cromarty, and "The North Sea a British Lake" and "your drill-ground must be your battle-ground" became the mottoes which were imposed on our Board of Admiralty.

But the fertile thoughts of Sir John Fisher were not confined to a fundamental change in our naval strategy. In 1905, with the aid of his experts, he designed the *Dreadnought*, a vessel fitted with turbines, more speedy than any battleship then in existence, carrying ten 12-inch guns, as opposed to the four 11-inch guns mounted on the German battleships, and protected by armour plate against projectiles from any guns save those of large calibre. From 1900 to 1906 Admiral Tirpitz had laid down no less than twelve large battleships as against our eighteen. But the four Dreadnoughts laid down in 1905–6, with a close secrecy maintained as to exact details, based on the experience of the Russo-Japanese War, upset all calculations, and gave us a lead in a new type of ship which in time would make the German Fleet obsolete. In addition to this, the *Dreadnought* displaced over 17,000 tons, whereas the biggest German battleship displaced no more than 13,000 tons. The Kiel Canal, then, was neither deep nor wide enough to give a free passage to vessels displacing 17,000 tons, and without such a passage from the

LORD FISHER

North Sea to the Baltic the value of the German Navy was almost halved.

Sir John Fisher had capped Admiral Tirpitz's bid.

Until the coming of the Dreadnought the German Admiralty had been laying down two large battleships every year. The plan of our Admiralty, who had laid down four Dreadnoughts in 1905, was to lay down, annually, four vessels of a similar type, and thus maintain the lead which we had established. These plans were changed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's Administration, and in 1906, 1907, and 1908 three, three, and two Dreadnoughts only were laid down, in the hope, if not in the belief, that this reduction would be met by a corresponding reduction in the German Fleet. And in the hope, too, that the Hague Convention of 1907 might be influenced, by such earnest of good intentions, to accept a general reduction of armaments.

In 1906 the German Admiralty had laid down two large battleships, but no work was done on them until July of 1907, by which time the type and design of the Dreadnought was more or less ascertained. In 1907 three vessels of the new type were laid down. In 1908 came Admiral Tirpitz's reply to Lord Fisher in the form of the new German Naval Law of 1908.

We have seen that the previous Naval Laws established the strength of the German Navy at thirty-eight battleships and twenty large cruisers, providing for the gradual supersession of the older ships by fixing the effective life of battleships at twenty-five years, and of cruisers at twenty years. The Law of 1908, while it made no change in the total number of battleships and large cruisers, interpreted large cruisers as being included in the new type of vessel, and, by fixing their effective life at twenty, instead of twenty-five years, accelerated the yearly building programme. Thus Germany was to be equipped with a Fleet of no fewer than fifty-eight Dreadnoughts, and this purpose was to be achieved by laying down four Dreadnoughts annually from 1908 to 1911, and two annually from 1911 to 1917.

"When at last," wrote Prince Bülow in surveying his policy, "during the Bosnian crisis, the sky of international politics cleared, when German power on the Continent burst its encompassing bonds, we had already got beyond the stage of preparation in the construction of our Fleet."

II

"Britannia rules the waves."

The increase in the German Navy, which reached a climax in the Naval Law of 1908, did not take place without producing considerable misgivings in the United Kingdom—misgivings which were increased by the advent of a Liberal Administration in 1906, and by the fact that Lord Tweedmouth, who then became First Lord of the Admiralty, for three years reduced the original programmes of Dreadnoughts. And "the German Peril," the "German challenge to British Naval Supremacy," soon became part of the normal political propaganda in the agitation to secure increases in our Naval Estimates.

This agitation did not escape the attention of the Kaiser, who, on February 14, 1908, wrote a personal letter to Lord Tweedmouth, explaining the objects of the new German Naval Law, and protesting that this in no way constituted a "German challenge to our supremacy."

> This phrase [he wrote], if not repudiated or corrected, sown broadcast over the country and daily dinned into British ears, might in the end produce most deplorable results. I therefore deem it advisable, as Admiral of the Fleet, to lay some facts before you, to enable you to see clearly.
>
> It is absolutely nonsensical and untrue that the German Naval Bill is to provide a Navy meant as a challenge to British supremacy. The German Fleet is built against nobody at all. It is solely built for Germany's needs in relation with that country's rapidly growing trade. . . . There is nothing surprising or underhand in it. . . . The law is being adhered to and provides for about 30–40 ships of the line in 1920. . . . The extraordinary rapidity with which improvements were introduced in types of battleships . . . made the fleet in commission obsolete before the building programme providing the additions to it was half finished. . . .
>
> Our actual programme in course of execution is practically only an exchange of old material for new, but not an addition to the number of units originally laid down by the Bill ten years ago, which is being adhered to.
>
> It is fair to suppose that each nation builds and commissions its Navy according to its needs, and not only with regard to the programme of other countries. Therefore it would be the simplest thing for England to say: I have a world-wide Empire, the greatest trade of the world, and to protect them I must have so-and-so many battleships, cruisers, etc., as are necessary to guarantee the supremacy of the sea to me. . . .
>
> That is the absolute right of your country, and nobody anywhere would

lose a word about it, and whether it be sixty or ninety or a hundred battleships that would make no difference and certainly no change in the German Naval Bill! May the numbers be as you think fit, but people would be very thankful over here if at last Germany was left out of the discussion. For it is very galling to the Germans to see their country continually held up as the sole danger and menace to Britain by the whole Press of the different contending parties: considering that other countries are building too, and there are even larger fleets than the German. . . .

In the letter Lord Esher caused to be published a short time ago he wrote, "that every German, from the Emperor down to the last man, wished for the downfall of Lord Fisher." Now, I am at a loss to tell whether the supervision of the foundations and drains of the Royal Palaces is apt to qualify somebody for the judgment of naval affairs in general. As far as regards German affairs naval, the phrase is a piece of unmitigated balderdash. . . .

Of course I need not assure you that nobody here dreams of wishing to influence Britain in the choice of those to whom she means to give the direction of her Navy, or to disturb them in the fulfilment of their noble task.

And he concluded by saying:

Once more. The German Naval Law is not aimed at England and is not "a challenge to British Supremacy of the Sea," which will remain unchallenged for generations to come. Let us remember the warning Admiral Sir John Fisher gave to his hearers in November when he so cleverly cautioned them not to get scared, by using the admirable phrase: "If Eve had not always kept her eye on the apple, she would not have eaten it, and we should not now be bothered with clothes."

The letter was not published until some years later, but somehow its contents leaked out, and on March 4 a mild sensation was caused by a letter which appeared in the "Times" from Colonel Repington, their well-known military correspondent, with the title of "Under which King?" stating that it had come to his knowledge that "His Majesty the German Emperor had recently addressed a letter to Lord Tweedmouth on the subject of British and German Naval Policy, and affirming that this letter amounted to an attempt to influence, in German interests, the Minister responsible for our Navy Estimates." A malicious savour was also added to the controversy, which followed from the fact that the references in the Kaiser's letter to Lord Esher, whose former position at the Board of Works qualified him for a seat on every committee called to consider questions of Imperial Defence, were freely repeated in select circles.

Mr. Asquith promptly disclaimed all Cabinet responsibility. Lord Tweedmouth gave a personal explanation in which he merely acknowledged that he had received a letter. And the affair blew over.

It is difficult, even in the light of subsequent events, to read any very clever or sinister purpose into the Emperor's communication. But the episode left an unpleasant atmosphere, and served to increase the misgivings which were felt with regard to German naval preparations. And when, on the death of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in April, the Liberal Government was reconstructed, Mr. McKenna replaced Lord Tweedmouth as First Lord of the Admiralty.

III

"The supreme feature of Sea War is its abrupt, its dramatic suddenness! Fleets are always mobilised and ready for instant war . . . and remember (above all remembrances) that an initial naval disaster is irreparable, irretrievable, eternal!"—*In a letter from Lord Fisher to a Friend, April* 20, 1904.

In accordance with the usual custom, the Naval Estimates for the year 1909–10 were prepared by the Admiralty in the autumn of 1908, and considered by the Cabinet during the following months.

The programme submitted by Mr. McKenna provided for the laying down of six Dreadnoughts for that year, and suggested that the needs of the situation would be met if a similar number were laid down each year in 1910 and 1911. These proposals led to a serious controversy in the Cabinet, the chief protagonists against them being Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill. The Press, on either side, was soon made aware of these differences, and six Dreadnoughts or four became the flags to which the two parties and their followers rallied, and under which they fought. But Mr. McKenna, backed by his Board of Admiralty, was obdurate. At one moment his resignation seemed unavoidable, and, but for the fact that this would have been followed by the resignation of Sir Edward Grey, the probability is that it would have taken place. A compromise was therefore reached, and estimates were presented for the year which included four Dreadnoughts only, but provided, in addition, that "His Majesty's Government might . . . find it necessary to make preparations for the rapid construction of four more large armoured ships." Mr. McKenna had won. In fact, one of the curious results of the

compromise was that he had obtained powers to build two more Dreadnoughts in 1909 than he really wanted. Thus presumably was retrenchment justified of its advocates in the Cabinet.

There remained only to satisfy the House of Commons.

The great majority of Liberal members knew little of the details of the new German Naval Law; they had been told practically nothing of the awkward foreign complications through which their Government had passed, and were still talking of disarmament and social reform. Progress seemed so easy and rapid under the spell of their own eloquence on the platform, and was so difficult and long-delayed, even under a Liberal Government, in the House of Commons. Three years had gone by, the Education Bill had been lost, the Licensing Bill had been thrown out by the Lords, and, worse still, was unpopular in the country. The fortunes of the Liberal Party were waning, the Parliament of 1906 was losing its youth, disillusionment had arrived. Social reform, to be popular, is necessarily expensive, and increased Naval Estimates spelt the death of social reform. Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill, they knew, had put up a gallant fight in the Cabinet, only to meet with failure. On March 9 they had listened to Mr. Haldane introducing his Army Estimates for the year amidst a stony silence. Had McKenna, Radical economist, child of the Treasury, disciple of Dilke, deserted them and joined the Jingoes? If so, were they to prove unworthy of better champions in the Cabinet? could they do nothing for the double cause of economy and peace?

Few of those who were present when the Navy Estimates were introduced on March 16, 1909, will forget the impression produced by the debate which followed. "The safety of the Empire," said Mr. McKenna at the opening of his speech, "stands above all considerations," and then, for the first time, our Naval Estimates were justified by selecting Germany as "the standard by which to measure our requirements," and British and German Dreadnoughts were counted, year by year, as if the two fleets were about to be pitted against each other.

The essential facts, as stated by Mr. McKenna, were contained in a very small compass. From 1905 to 1908 we had laid down twelve Dreadnoughts, all of which would be ready by the end of 1910. In the same period Germany had laid down five Dreadnoughts, which were also expected to be ready in the autumn of 1910. The German Naval Law of 1908 had provided that four Dreadnoughts should be laid down in 1908–9, and our programme

of four similar ships for 1909–10 was based on the assumption that no work would begin on the German vessels until August of 1908, and that they would not be completed until February of 1911. However, the preparation and collection of materials for these ships had been begun earlier, and the Admiralty anticipated that they might be completed by the autumn of 1910. Further than this, similar preparations had been begun for four more ships of the 1909–10 programme. In other words, the German programme had been accelerated by adding four ships from the 1909–10 to the 1908–9 programme, thus increasing the number of the latter programme to eight, four of which might be completed in the autumn of 1910, and four in the course of 1911. If these expectations were fulfilled Germany would be equipped, in the course of 1911, with no less than thirteen Dreadnoughts, as opposed to our sixteen, including the four vessels to be laid down in 1909–10. But the possibilities did not even end there: Germany might again accelerate her programme by taking four ships from the 1910–11 programme, and laying them down in the course of 1909–10. These might be ready in April 1912, and in any case would be completed by the autumn of 1912, without any acceleration at all. Therefore, in April of 1912 Germany might have seventeen Dreadnoughts to our sixteen, and in any case would have seventeen in the autumn of 1912. To maintain our superiority in Dreadnoughts, therefore, Mr. McKenna asked for powers to include four more vessels in his 1909–10 programme, which were only to be laid down, in the event of the suspected German acceleration really maturing, and which, in March 1912, would give us twenty Dreadnoughts as against the German seventeen.

Mr. Balfour suggested the further hypothesis that Admiral Tirpitz might not only accelerate his programme, by laying down eight Dreadnoughts in 1908, but even accelerate it further by laying down eight in 1909, which would give Germany twenty-one Dreadnoughts in April 1912. It was even possible, to his mind, that Germany might have twenty-five by that date, and we should only have twenty-one, including the four contingent ships. While Mr. Asquith did not accept all these calculations, he accepted the statement that seventeen German Dreadnoughts in April 1912 "was a possibility" and thirteen "a certainty."

The effect produced by these speeches on the House of Commons was simply overwhelming. When Mr. Asquith sat down, after replying to Mr. Balfour, no one rose to speak, and the vote

would have been put from the chair, without further discussion, had not Mr. Arnold Lupton, a well-known crank, caught the Speaker's eye at the last moment and thus prevented the collapse of the debate. Members melted away into the lobbies to discuss the sensation which had been created. Mr. McKenna had indeed secured the safe passage of his estimates, including the four contingent Dreadnoughts; but he had proved almost too much, and had created a first-class naval "scare." The Radical stalwarts who had come, like Balaam, ready to curse, were for the moment, almost convinced that they must remain and bless.

Further debates followed, including a formal vote of censure on the Government, which, by an unhappy coincidence, was taken on April 1, and helped to fan the flames of a popular agitation. Aided by the magic chant of—

> "Eight, eight, eight,
> We won't have less than eight.
> So we'll smash them flat
> If they won't give us that;
> We will have eight."

The Conservative candidate won a bye-election at Croydon by a majority of nearly 4,000: the Navy League demonstrated at one London theatre, the Imperial Maritime League at another; the Government were accused of having betrayed national safety; war with Germany was declared to be "inevitable"; our naval supremacy was said to be a thing of the past. For the time being the lower political stratum had broken into the upper and carried everything along with it. Fortunately Mr. Lloyd George's famous Budget was introduced shortly afterwards, and, though the agitation over the Navy was carried on continuously and familiarised the public with the "German menace," political attention from thence on was concentrated on the Budget.

It is impossible to say with certainty whether the German Admiralty had really intended to accelerate their programme. As subsequent events were to show, with the possible exception of one vessel (the *Oldenburg*), which was included in the 1908–9 instead of the 1909–10 programme, there was no acceleration at all, and the provisions of the Naval Act of 1908 were strictly adhered to. Whatever their intentions may have been, their plans were upset by Sir John Fisher (now Lord Fisher) who again outbid Admiral Tirpitz. For, of the eight vessels included in our 1909–10 programme, six were super-Dreadnoughts,

of a new and improved design, carrying 13·5-inch in place of 12-inch guns, thus securing to us a substantial lead in ships of a superior type, completely upsetting for the time being all German plans, and delaying the completion of ships which had already been laid down. So effective was this delay and derangement that, when the "really critical date" of March 1912 arrived, which figured so largely in the debates of 1909, instead of the seventeen German Dreadnoughts which were stated to be "a possibility," or the thirteen which were said to be a "certainty," nine only were completed and ready.

Almost immediately after Mr. McKenna's speech on March 16 both Admiral Tirpitz and Prince Bülow disclaimed, in the Reichstag, any intention of accelerating their naval programme. The Radical economists recovered from their nightmare, and Mr. Winston Churchill ranged himself formally on their side. On April 15, in a letter to "My dear Sir George Ritchie," the Chairman of his Liberal Association at Dundee, which can only be read as a criticism of the policy of the Government of which he was a member, he heaped ridicule on "the Dreadnought-fear-all school." After having denounced the fear of a German invasion as "a false lying panic started in the party interests of the Conservatives," he enumerated our large preponderance in ships of the pre-Dreadnought type, emphasised the fact that the British Navy had double as many sailors as the German, picked, twelve-years' service men as against three-year conscripts, estimated that our whole naval strength was more nearly thrice than twice that of Germany, and concluded by saying :

> In view of these tremendous margins of safety, the cries of sheer cowardice with which the air is filled contribute a good deal more to the gaiety of other nations than to the dignity of our own.
>
> The second cardinal error now current on these matters is to suppose that modern fleets can be built without anybody knowing anything about them, and without anybody paying for them, so that, as if by enchantment, without apparent effort or sacrifice of any kind, some huge, unexpected squadron might steam suddenly out of secrecy on to the sea. Such ideas are childish.
>
> I have left the most monstrous error to the last. It is this—that there is a profound antagonism of interests between the British and the German nations which can only be resolved by a supreme trial of strength towards which the tides of destiny are irresistibly bearing us. . . . No more abject repudiation, not only of the whole message of Liberalism, but of the very structure of civilisation, could be demanded of us. It is not true. There

is no natural antagonism between the interests of the British and German peoples. . . . If a serious antagonism is gradually created between the two peoples, it will not be because of the workings of any natural or impersonal forces, but through the vicious activity of a comparatively small number of individuals in both countries and the culpable credulity of a larger class.

Still, in spite of these alarms, rigid discipline was never a feature of Mr. Asquith's Cabinets, and with much private pressure from his Liberal supporters Mr. McKenna went his way. In the House of Commons it is the first blow that tells, and opposition, once deferred, seldom gathers real strength again. When the estimates were first introduced the economists had been carried off their legs, and though when Mr. McKenna, in July, announced that the four contingent Dreadnoughts would be laid down, he had to face the hostile votes of a few Liberals, and most of the members of the Labour and Nationalist Parties, he had really won a decisive victory on March 16. In addition, by July, the real interest of the Radicals had been transferred to the Budget, and the picture of the dukes and upper classes calling for more battleships, and then opposing the consequent taxation to pay for them, lent itself peculiarly to their artistic talents, and almost reconciled them to the additional Dreadnoughts. "A fully equipped duke," cried Mr. Lloyd George at Newcastle on October 8, "costs as much to keep as two Dreadnoughts, and dukes are just as great a terror, and they last longer." Still, a large number of Liberals never really forgave Mr. McKenna, whose policy, as was well known, had prevailed over that of Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill. And their feelings were further ruffled by the jocular threat of Lord Fisher, which was repeated in select circles, to call the four extra Dreadnoughts, *Lloyd, George, Winston,* and *Churchill,* in memory of the fight which had taken place in the Cabinet.

As they contemplated the Budget and all the hopes that it raised, they were always haunted by the fear that it might be made into an "armour-plate" Budget. Fears which were not lessened when Mr. Lloyd George, on October 30, contributed to the "Nation," which earlier in the year, in criticising the Naval Estimates, had drawn a picture of the "Two paths for Liberalism," deploring that the broad rather than the narrow way had been chosen, and had "thanked God" that, "if we had a Palmerstonian Prime Minister press the case for enlarged armaments," we had "a Gladstonian Chancellor of the Exchequer labouring valiantly and not alone in

the double cause of economy and peace," a special article which was a criticism of the past and a direct challenge for the future :

The mistake made by the Liberal Government of 1894 [he wrote], will not be repeated. Sir William Harcourt's great financial proposals raised a large revenue for the State, but it was not hypothecated by the author and his colleagues to any specific purpose. The result was that when the Tory Government came into power they reaped the abundant harvest sown by Sir William Harcourt to squander it on the most reckless enterprises. . . .

What was left after the landlords had enjoyed the first cut was frittered away on futile armaments. How futile that expenditure the South African War demonstrated to the world ; . . . . this surplus should be ear-marked from the outset in so far as the declaration of the Government could accomplish that object, to ends which might in themselves be beneficent and fruitful. . . .

The protectionist party in this country are more alarmed about those schemes than about our methods of taxation. They recognise that these plans, when matured, will appreciably increase the bank balance of Liberalism. For that reason, even if the Budget goes through, I predict that another concerted effort will be made to rouse a fresh naval and military panic, so as to rush the Government into the criminal extravagance of unnecessary armaments on land and sea.

A successful agitation of that kind would bankrupt social reform, and the enormous advantage which would otherwise be gained by means of the Budget surplus would be completely thrown away. Nothing would be left for our pains but the bare taxes.

So there will be the usual crop of rumours about German plans and preparations. We know how little foundation existed for the last scare. In the light of established facts the March fright which shook Britain and convulsed the Colonies looks rather foolish. Mr. Balfour's twenty-five German Dreadnoughts in 1912 have, for the moment, disappeared from the stage. The sensational drama of a foreign invasion has ceased to draw.

It is not now to the interests of the Tory Party to dwell too much on " the national emergency " whilst the country sees them fighting with grim tenacity in the House of Commons against the fund which the Government are raising to meet it.

But, when the taxes are established, the Tory members will strive to divert their produce from the channel of fruitful reform, which may win gratitude for the party which initiates it, to the barren waste which ends in popular disappointment and national restlessness, or even disaster.

Liberals will have themselves to blame if they lack the perspicacity and firmness to resist these manufactured cries of national danger.

However, Mr. Lloyd George proposed, Mr. McKenna disposed, and remained at the Admiralty until October of 1911. He laid

down five Dreadnoughts in 1910–11; and five more in 1911–12, thus completing the programme of eighteen which he had originally proposed to the Cabinet. When he went to the Admiralty he found the annual cost of the Navy £32,188,000; he left it at £42,858,000. He inherited, it is true, commitments for existing contracts amounting to £10,250,000, but he left a similar legacy of £23,500,000 to his successor. During the three years of his administration he spent no less than £39,750,000 on new construction. During this period, amongst his own party he was the most unpopular member of the Government. But when the storm broke in August 1914, the eighteen Dreadnoughts included in his programmes were in the line, and no one then suggested that there were four too many.

In 1918 bouquets, which no one grudges them, were freely given to other men who "won the war." But History, remembering his work, his foresight, and his genius, will one day place even choicer flowers at Lord Fisher's feet, and may spare one or two for Mr. McKenna, recalling the fight he fought and the place he risked in the Cabinet of 1909.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND MOROCCAN CRISIS

"There is a hush in Europe, a hush in which you may almost hear a leaf fall to the ground. There is an absolute absence of any questions which ordinarily lead to war. . . . All forebodes peace; and yet, at the same time . . . there never was in the history of the world so threatening and so overpowering a preparation for war."—*Lord Rosebery: Speech at Shepherd's Bush on June 5, 1909.*

I

THE crisis with regard to our Naval Estimates for 1909 was hardly over, before the country was plunged into a crisis of a different nature caused by the rejection of Mr. Lloyd George's Budget by the House of Lords. And in the course of two elections in 1910 the will of the people, subject to proper safeguards and adequate delay, won a decisive victory. During this period the political atmosphere in Europe was fairly calm. After the Bosnian crisis Prince Bülow has told us that normal relations between Russia and Germany were quickly restored, as was proved by the particularly satisfactory meeting between the Emperor William and the Tsar, which took place amongst the islands off the coast of Finland in June 1909. On the other hand, the Tsar's visit to this country in the same year was not well received by certain Labour and advanced circles, who did not place the same value on a good understanding with Russia as did Prince Bülow, or practical Republican France. And it would seem that the relations of the new Triple Entente cooled a little, for in November 1910 the Tsar again met the Kaiser at Potsdam and came to an agreement as to their general relations, the details of which are not known, and also as to certain railways then under construction in Persia.

But Morocco remained like a witches' cauldron, in which trouble was perpetually simmering, ready at any moment to be poured over Europe. And in the summer of 1911 trouble bubbled up before a French Protectorate was finally established in North-West Africa.

II

We have already seen something of the various ententes and understandings which had been taking place in Europe since 1900, and, at the risk of repetition, we must summarise these "arrangements" once again, adding such further details as are necessary to illustrate why the second and last Moroccan crisis nearly precipitated a European war.

In 1848 France, at the cost of many lives and by the expenditure of much money, had made Algeria into a French Colony; and in 1881, egged on by Bismarck, who wished to see France forget in colonial expansion the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, French control was established in Tunis. For many miles Algeria and Morocco are conterminous; small wonder, therefore, that French Imperialists dreamt of a North-West African Empire which should one day replace the Empire which the old *régime*, under Louis XV, had lost in the Indies. Accordingly, oases over the border were annexed and a tentative "peaceful penetration" soon began. But other countries were interested in Morocco as well as France; Spain possessed settlements on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts; Britain, Germany, Italy, and other nations had commercial interests which depended on the maintenance of the "open door." In addition to which, our strategic interests required an independent Morocco to prevent the coasts of the Mediterranean and North Atlantic falling into the hands of a European Power, which might threaten our route to India. Diplomatic skill had, therefore, to be exercised before the tricolour could fly over a North-West African Empire.

Under the astute guidance of M. Delcassé, France, in 1900, first of all disinterested Italy in Morocco by recognising Italian claims to Tripoli. In the following year a proposal was made to partition Morocco with Spain, under which Spain was to receive North Central Morocco, including Fez and the North African coast, and France the remainder. But this was before the days of the Entente Cordiale, and when the arrangement came to the knowledge of our Foreign Office they were seriously displeased and vetoed its completion. "It was Providence which intervened at that moment to show its love for Spain," said the Spanish Prime Minister in explaining later why this treaty was not signed. "France," he added, "offered us her diplomatic support, but this was not sufficient to comfort me under the circumstances."

But M. Delcassé was not to be discouraged by this little set-back. Accordingly, in April 1904 he carried through the Entente Cordiale between France and ourselves, which, amongst other things, dealt with the respective positions of both countries in Egypt and Morocco in the following terms :

I. His Britannic Majesty's Government declare that they have no intention of altering the political status of Egypt.

The Government of the French Republic, for their part, declare that they will not obstruct the action of Great Britain in that country by asking that a limit of time be fixed for the British occupation or in any other manner, and that they give their assent to the draft annexed to the present arrangement containing the guarantee considered necessary for the protection of the interests of the Egyptian bondholders, on the condition that, after its promulgation, it cannot be modified in any way without the consent of the Powers signatory of the Convention of London, 1885.

II. The Government of the French Republic declare that they have no intention of altering the political status of Morocco.

His Britannic Majesty's Government recognise that it appertains to France . . . whose dominions are conterminous for a great distance with those of Morocco, to preserve order in that country, and to provide assistance for the purpose of all administrative, economic, financial, and military reforms which it may require.

They declare that they will not obstruct the action taken by France for this purpose, provided that such action shall leave intact the rights which Governments, in virtue of treaties, conventions, and usage enjoy in Morocco, including the right of coasting trade between the ports of Morocco enjoyed by British vessels since 1907.

VII. In order to secure the free passage of the Straits of Gibraltar, the two Governments agree not to permit the erection of any fortifications and strategic works on that portion of the coast of Morocco comprised between, but not including, Melilla and the heights which command the right bank of the river Sebon. This condition does not, however, apply to the places at present in the occupation of Spain on the Moorish coast of the Mediterranean

VIII. The two Governments, inspired by their feeling of sincere friendship for Spain, take into special consideration the interests which that country derives from her geographical position and from her territorial possessions on the Moorish coast of the Mediterranean. In regard to those interests the French Government will come to an understanding with the Spanish Government.

IX. The two Governments agree to afford to one another their diplomatic support in order to obtain the execution of the clauses of the present declaration regarding Egypt and Morocco.

So ran the agreement which was published to the world. But in a secret agreement, which was signed at the same time, provision was made for the event of "either Government finding themselves constrained by force of circumstances to modify the policy in respect of Egypt and Morocco," in which case it was agreed that "the Government of the French Republic would not refuse to entertain any such proposals," on the understanding that "His Britannic Majesty's Government would agree to entertain the suggestions that the Government of the French Republic might have to make to them with a view of introducing similar reforms in Morocco." And, in addition, the two Governments agreed that "a certain extent of Moorish territory adjacent to Melilla, Ceuta, and other *presides* should, whenever the Sultan ceased to exercise authority over it, come within the sphere of influence of Spain and that the administration of the coast from Melilla as far as, but not including, the heights on the right bank of the Sebon should be entrusted to Spain."

When this agreement was completed it was possible for Spain to accept her share in the eventual partition, without any feeling of uneasiness. On October 3, 1904, therefore, the Spanish Government signed a public agreement with France, giving their formal concurrence to the Anglo-French agreement, declaring that "they remained firmly attached to the integrity of the Moorish Empire under the sovereignty of the Sultan," and also a secret agreement in which the "sphere of influence which fell to Spain by virtue of her possessions on the Moorish coast of the Mediterranean" was defined with geographical exactitude in Article II, and it was further agreed by Article III that :

> In case the continuance of the political status of Morocco and of the Shereefian Government should become impossible, or if, owing to the weakness of that Government and to its continued inability to uphold law and order, or to any other cause, the existence of which is acknowledged by both parties, the *status quo* can no longer be maintained, Spain may freely exercise her right of action in the territory defined in the preceding article, which henceforward constitutes her sphere of influence.

In plain language these two public agreements, together with the secret clauses, meant that in exchange for the "regularisation" of our position in Egypt, we had agreed to the ultimate establishment of a French Protectorate in Morocco, safeguarding our strategic position in the Mediterranean by stipulating that, in this event, the North-West African coast should be held by Spain.

Time had brought strange revenges! Not long after the establishment of Islam, the Arabs of North Africa had conquered the greater part of Spain, endowed her for ever with the splendour of their architecture and their arts, and had pushed to the very heat of France. Eight hundred years later England trembled when a Spanish Armada set sail to invade her shores. Now the last remnant of Moorish independence fell a victim to a squalid partition, of which Spain's share of the spoils was a strip of the Moorish coast to be held as a harmless buffer State.

III

When these diplomatic adjustments had been made, M. Delcassé judged that the moment had come to make a move forward with his policy of peaceful penetration in Morocco. The young Sultan was partly Europeanised, he was also extravagant, and a beginning had been made when French banks had obliged him with a loan secured on 60 per cent. of the customs receipts, thus giving France a large measure of control over the Customs. In 1905, therefore, M. Delcassé submitted a formidable series of reforms in Morocco which would have placed the Army, the State Bank, the Customs, and the Administration under the dominant control of France. To these proposals the Sultan, having been assured of German support, declined to submit, and appealed to the Kaiser; the Kaiser went to Tangier in his yacht, the *Hamburg*, landed in March 1905, and addressed the inhabitants thus:

> The object of my visit to Tangier is to make it known that I am determined to do all that is in my power to safeguard efficaciously the interests of Germany in Morocco. I look upon the Sultan as an absolutely independent Sovereign, and it is with him that I desire to come to an understanding as to the best means to bring that result about.
>
> As for the reforms which the Sultan intends to introduce into this country, I consider that he should proceed with much precaution, and should take into account the religious feelings of his subjects, so that at no moment shall public order be troubled as a consequence of these reforms.

This was a direct challenge to France. M. Delcassé wished to stand firm; our Foreign Office, under Lord Lansdowne, was ready to back M. Delcassé, though to what extent is not apparent; a Paris newspaper, the "Temps," accusing us at the time of pushing France on in a dangerous affair which did not concern her. But serious deficiencies in the French Army were admitted in a debate

in the Chamber on April 19; the Russian Army had been recently heavily defeated by the Japanese; and it was not, therefore, surprising that M. Delcassé found himself in a minority of one in the French Cabinet, and, rather than consent to a Conference, under German coercion, he resigned on June 6. On July 12, in an interview to the "Gaulois" he gave the following justification of the policy which his colleagues had been unwilling to endorse :

> Of what importance would the young Navy of Germany be in the event of war in which England, I tell you, would assuredly be with us against Germany? What would become of Germany's ports or her trade, or her mercantile marine? They would be annihilated. That is what would be the meaning of the visit, prepared and calculated, of the British Squadron to Brest, while the return visit of the French Squadron to Portsmouth will complete the demonstration. The Entente between the two countries, and the coalition of their Navies, constitutes such a formidable machine of naval war that neither Germany nor any other Power would dare to face such an overwhelming force at sea.

However, M. Delcassé having resigned, France, despite these advantages, gave way, and representatives of Germany, Austria, Belgium, Spain, the United States of America, France, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Russia met in solemn conference at Algeciras in the beginning of 1906, to settle a scheme of "reform" for Morocco.

It would seem that the French Government had contemplated the possibility of a rupture taking place at this Conference, for we have seen that in January of 1906, M. Cambon had asked Sir Edward Grey, who had succeeded Lord Lansdowne at the Foreign Office on the resignation of Mr. Balfour's Adminisration, whether "if that crisis developed into war between France and Germany, we would give armed support," and that Sir Edward Grey had expressed the opinion that "if war was forced upon France, then on the question of Morocco—a question which had just been the subject of agreement between this country and France, an agreement exceedingly popular on both sides—that if out of that agreement war was forced on France at that time, in his view public opinion in this country would rally to the material support of France."

But the Conference proved equal to the occasion, and produced in April of 1906 the Act of Algeciras, which, according to its preamble, inspired by the interest which attached to the reign of order, peace, and prosperity in Morocco, and having

recognised that this desirable end could only be attained by means of reforms based upon the threefold principle of the sovereignty and independence of His Majesty the Sultan, the integrity of his dominions, and economic liberty without any misquality," agreed on an elaborate code which established police, provided a state bank, reformed the Army by placing French and Spanish officers and instructors subject to inspection by a Swiss superior officer at the disposal of the Sultan, set on foot public works, put down smuggling and illicit trading in arms, but gave no dominant political position to France. In reality the Conference settled nothing. "We are neither victors nor vanquished," said Prince Bülow afterwards, and the French Prime Minister, M. Rouvier, expressed the same sentiments. Nevertheless, France was left free to continue her policy of peaceful penetration in so far as Germany should make no objections.

IV

After the Algeciras Convention, although the French Chamber periodically passed resolutions reiterating their devotion to the independence of Morocco and the sovereignty of the Sultan, France proceeded with her peaceful penetration in the normal way, repeated disorders giving ample excuse. Udja, a town just over the Algerian frontier, was occupied in March of 1907; in July of the same year a Franco-Spanish syndicate, which was building a railway from Casablanca, drove the railway through an ancient Moorish cemetery; this offended local susceptibilities and was followed by riots; Casablanca was accordingly bombarded by French and Spanish warships, the town and district was occupied by a military force, and the Moorish Government was presented with a bill for over £2,000,000 for the expenses thus incurred: Moroccan finances were then taken in hand by an international syndicate in which French interest predominated; loans were consolidated; the sum necessary to pay the indemnity lent, and the remainder of the Customs, and such other sources of revenue as existed, were hypothecated by way of security.

These events, which necessitated the taxation of his people, did not add to the popularity of the Sultan; civil war followed, and, though in January 1908 Abdul Aziz was deposed and succeeded by his brother, Malai Hafid, chaos reigned in Morocco.

However, on February 9, 1909, France and Germany came to a separate agreement under which France—

Entirely attached to the maintenance of the integrity and independence of the Moorish Empire, was resolved to safeguard in Morocco economic equality, and therefore not to hinder the commercial or industrial interests of the Germans there. And Germany, "pursuing only economic interests in Morocco," recognising that "the particular political interests of France there were closely connected with the consolidation of order and internal peace, was decided not to hinder those interests"; consequently both Governments declared that—

They would not continue nor undertake any measure of a nature to create in their favour or of any other Power any economic privilege; and that they would endeavour to associate their citizens in the business for which they might obtain concessions.

This agreement was concluded with mutual felicitations: the Kaiser congratulated Schoen, the German Ambassador in Paris, King Edward, who was in Berlin at the time, complimented M. Cambon; the "Temps," on February 10, spoke of "a lasting understanding." Prince Bülow stated in the Reichstag on March 29 that the agreement "assured to France, who was specially interested in the maintenance of order in Morocco, a legitimate political influence without giving the possibility of annexing Morocco in any form." For the time being, every one was pleased, though it was obvious that the success of the agreement in Germany would depend on the positive results which would be reaped by German finance, industry, and commerce.

It is almost an impossible task, with the information available, to find one's way through the tangle of the negotiations which followed; high politics, cosmopolitan finance, international armament firms, all contributing to the difficulties which followed and made the agreement miscarry.

All attempts to co-operate in the working of the mines failed, probably owing to the excessive demands of the German brothers Mannesmann. Failure also attended the attempts to secure co-operation in public works, and for this, on the other hand and according to M. Tardieu, the French Government was mainly to blame. Negotiations for co-operation in building the railways, to which the Germans naturally attached great importance, dragged on for two years and more, without any definite result: the French authorities had planned a railway system which would connect their railways in Algiers with the inland capitals of Fez and Morocco City, thus enabling them to send troops into the heart of Morocco, and divert Moroccan produce to Algerian ports, where French tariffs prevailed. The German authorities,

not unnaturally, wished the railway from Fez to Tangier to be opened first, which would draw this produce to the open port of Tangier. But France was always able to find a thousand and one good reasons which compelled her to start the other lines and not the Fez-Tangier system. And although, on March 4, 1911, M. Cambon warned his Government gravely that if they "gave Germany reason to think that they grudged an agreement with her, such as their accord of February 9, 1909, implied, many difficulties might be created," the negotiations made no progress.

Unfortunately, too, negotiations in another direction met with even worse results: for some years a large portion of the French Congo which borders on the Western frontier of the German Cameroons had become, by the presence of German settlers, almost a German colony. In 1909 and 1910 attempts had been made by the French and German Governments to arrive at a "Consortium" under which a large area of the French Congo would be exploited by a Franco-German company armed with police rights. On December 15, 1910, letters were actually exchanged agreeing to this Consortium. But this arrangement necessitated the payment by the French Government of a large sum as compensation to the French syndicate, which was to be merged in the new Franco-German combination. This payment was violently opposed by the Socialists, led by M. Jaurès and M. Albert Thomas, who were equally opposed to the forward policy in Morocco. As a result of this agitation, M. Briand's Cabinet resigned in February 1911, and was replaced by that of M. Monis. M. Monis, though opposed to the Consortium, was in favour of the forward policy. And, in spite of warnings as to the effect which this action might produce, the new Cabinet repudiated the Consortium, which their predecessors had carried through.

Thus the forward policy in Morocco continued, and on April 4 the Powers were notified that continued disorders in the region of Fez might make it necessary for the French Government to "take certain military measures for the safety of their colonists." And though, on April 5, M. Cambon assured Herr Kiderlen Waechter, the German Foreign Secretary, that, even if it might be necessary to occupy Fez, his Government would observe "the spirit of the Act of Algeciras and not lose sight of the maintenance of the sovereignty of the Sultan," he had to report that Herr Kiderlen "received this remark with a smile," and that he seemed "preoccupied with the effect which action by France in Morocco would cause in Germany."

It is probable that the new French Cabinet under M. Monis had not had time in which fully to appreciate the connection, which existed between high politics and the business negotiations which had been taking place with regard to Morocco and the Congo. For in spite of the bad atmosphere produced in Germany by their failure, further notifications were given of the possibility of military action in Fez, in reply to which, on April 19, Bethmann-Hollweg, the German Chancellor, warned M. Cambon of the dangerous attitude of German opinion, and told him, "If you go to Fez, you will not go away, in which case a question will be raised which at all costs I would wish to avoid." On April 25 the march on Fez was announced, and on the same day Bethmann-Hollweg again warned M. Cambon, "When you are at Fez can you abandon Mulai Hafid? Can you leave Fez? And, if you do not leave, do you think that the independence of Morocco will remain? It is the beginning of difficulties of which I cannot now estimate the extent, but which go far and may destroy all the work for which the two Governments have laboured for three years."

However, M. Cambon assured Bethmann-Hollweg that no permanent occupation was intended, and proceeded once again to try to come to an agreement with regard to the railways in Morocco. During the following month both sides marked time, and Herr Kiderlen having gone to Kissingen to seek rest and recuperation, active negotiations were suspended for the time being. Meanwhile conditions at Fez did not help the belief that a withdrawal in the near future was very probable, and the position was further complicated by the action of Spain. In spite of feverish protestations from the French Government, the Spanish Government interpreted the events which were taking place in Morocco as a fulfilment of the conditions provided for in their secret agreement, under which France and Spain were to proceed to occupy the territories assigned to them. Accordingly on June 3 two Spanish cruisers were sent to the port of Larache, and a few days later Spanish troops were landed. Things were heading to a crisis.

On June 21 M. Cambon went to Kissingen to discuss matters with M. Kiderlen, and a "difficult" interview took place:

> You have left at Fez [said Herr Kiderlen] a situation quite other than that you found: forces under French commanders spread over the country, and a Sultan at your service. . . . I do not oppose your influence; but influence does not mean protectorate, and it is, in fact, a protectorate that

you are about to create. That is not in the Act of Algeciras nor in the agreement of 1909.

But, at the close of the interview, the suggestion was made that a settlement might be reached by "looking elsewhere," and Herr Kiderlen asked M. Cambon, who was leaving to discuss matters with his Home Government, "to bring back something from Paris." M. Cambon left for Paris, only to find, shortly after his arrival on June 25, that M. Monis's Government had been defeated on a question of electoral reform, and that a new Government under M. Caillaux was in process of formation.

Meanwhile Herr Kiderlen and Bethmann-Hollweg had met the Kaiser on his yacht at Kiel, and on July 1 a German gunboat, the *Panther*, was sent to Agadir, preceded by a Note to the Powers who had signed the Act of Algeciras, alleging various acts in contravention of the treaty by France, and promising that "as soon as the state of affairs in Morocco had resumed the former tranquil aspect, the vessel charged with this protective mission would leave the port."

V

The dispatch of the *Panther* created a great sensation in Europe. Curiously enough, it produced less excitement in France than here, for the new Foreign Minister, M. de Selves, left Paris on a complimentary visit to Holland with President Fallières, and did not return until July 7. On July 4 M. Caillaux informed the Powers that the German Government had invited France to hold conversations on the subject of Morocco, and, on July 9, M. Cambon, who had then returned to Berlin, was able to report that the German Government was willing "to give up all territorial claims in Morocco, and seek colonial compensation on the Congo." And on this basis, and subject to a pledge of secrecy on either side, the negotiations continued.

Meanwhile Sir Edward Grey had taken a hand in the game. On July 4 he told the German Ambassador that a "new situation had been created," and that we "could not recognise any new arrangement that might be come to without us." On July 6 Mr. Asquith made a public statement in the House of Commons, in the course of which he stated that he considered "that a new situation had arisen in Morocco in which it was possible that future developments might affect British interests

more directly than had been the case," and, after hoping that a solution would be found, he added that " we should have due regard to the protection of those interests and to the fulfilment of our treaty obligations to France, which were well known to the House." After which our Government was content to await events.

By July 14 the negotiations between Herr Kiderlen and M. Cambon had become " practical," and almost brutally frank by July 16, for on this date Herr Kiderlen, " having got a map," showed M. Cambon " the French Congo between the sea and the Sangha," and, having told M. Cambon, " You did a deal with Spain, with England, and even with Italy over Morocco; but you left us out. You ought to have dealt with us before going to Fez," proceeded to suggest a large territorial exchange. And although M. Cambon demurred to the extent of this proposal, as he had contemplated a mere rectification of frontiers, the negotiations went on.

But Sir Edward Grey had again become anxious.

I was afraid [he told the House of Commons on November 27], and I spoke to the German Ambassador because I was afraid that things were developing in a way that would bring up the Morocco question, force the Moroccan negotiations back, not upon an arrangement between France and Germany about the Congo and Morocco respectively, but upon something in the nature of the partition of Morocco or some sort of solution which might make the question of British interests to be directly affected, and which would certainly bring into operation our treaty obligations with France.

But, unfortunately, France and Germany having agreed that their negotiations should be confidential, the German Ambassador was not in a position to give Sir Edward " any information." This led to a misunderstanding: Sir Edward Grey thought he was being ignored deliberately. It so happened that Mr. Lloyd George was due to speak at the Mansion House that night, and at Sir Edward Grey's request, and after consultation with Mr. Asquith, he spoke as follows:

But I am also bound to say this—that I believe it is essential in the highest interests not merely of this country, but of the world, that Britain should at all hazards maintain her place and prestige amongst the great nations of the world. Her potent influence has many a time in the past, and may yet be in the future, invaluable to the cause of human liberty. It

has more than once in the past redeemed continental nations, who are sometimes apt to forget that service, from overwhelming disaster and even from international extinction. I would make great sacrifices to preserve peace. I conceive that nothing would justify a disturbance of international good-will except questions of the gravest national moment. But if a situation were to be forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position Britain has won by centuries of heroism and achievement, by allowing Britain to be treated, when her interests were vitally affected, as if she was of no account in the Cabinet of nations, then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure. National honour is no party question. The security of our great international trade is no party question. The peace of the world is much more likely to be secured if all nations realise fairly what the conditions of peace must be. And it is because I have the conviction that nations are beginning to understand each other better, to appreciate one another's point of view more thoroughly, to be ready to discuss calmly and dispassionately their differences, that I feel assured that nothing will happen between now and next year which will render it difficult for the Chancellor of the Exchequer in this place to respond to the toast proposed to you, my Lord Mayor, of the continued prosperity of the public peace.

These words, eloquent it is true, did not do much to illuminate or fit the situation. But coming from a statesman who had hitherto belonged to the pacific section of the Cabinet, they fanned the flames of excitement both in Germany and here. On July 24 Sir Edward Grey again saw the German Ambassador, who was then able to tell him, in reply to the question asked three days before, that Germany had never thought of creating a naval port on the coast of Morocco and never would think of it; "such ideas were hallucinations." But the German Government would not consent to this information being used in Parliament "in view of the speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer." The German Ambassador was "stiff," but Sir Edward Grey could be "stiff" too, and inasmuch as the German Government had said "that it was not consistent with their dignity, after the speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to give explanations as to what was taking place at Agadir," Sir Edward Grey replied that it was not consistent with his dignity "to give explanations as to the speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer."

Fortunately the negotiations were in the hands of the more practical French; fortunately, too, Sir Edward Grey was able to unbend and do all in his power to help them, and the negotiations continued. Towards the middle of August, under the influence

of the coming elections in Germany and the consequent Pan-German agitation, the negotiations threatened to break down. On August 13 M. de Selves, the French Foreign Secretary, had reason to think that the German General Staff contemplated a landing in Morocco, and called the French General Staff into consultation. A few days later both Russia and ourselves were warned that the situation was serious. The second Moroccan Crisis was in full swing.

It will be remembered that, at the time of the previous Moroccan Crisis in 1906, Sir Edward Grey had assured M. Cambon that, " if war was forced upon France then on the question of Morocco . . . in his view public opinion in this country would rally to the material support of France." On this occasion Sir Edward Grey " took precisely the same line." But in five years the lower stratum of the Cabinet under Mr. Haldane had been moving; an expeditionary force had been created, military " conversations " had ceased to be mere hypothetical expressions of good-will; provision for possible eventualities had been made; the military manœuvres for 1911 had not been held, and the money thus saved was spent on perfecting arrangements for mobilisation. It was now only necessary that a visible button on the upper stratum should be pressed, and within thirteen days six British Divisions and a Cavalry Division would be in their appointed places on the Belgian frontier. Everything, it now appeared, had been prepared by General Wilson and the French General Staff, down to the *dix minutes d'arrêt* which would give the soldiers their morning cup of tea in France. But we must not forget that our policy consisted of two strata, both of which happened to be represented even in the Committee of Imperial Defence. When this body met to consider and prepare for possibilities an unexpected incident arose: the arrangements which had been made did not include transports to disembark the Expeditionary Force. Mr. McKenna, the First Lord of the Admiralty, was asked to get them ready, but he declined to do so on the ground that they could not be gathered secretly, that their preparation might consequently precipitate war, and for this he would not take the responsibility until the Cabinet had so decided. Now the Committee of Imperial Defence is a consultative body only, without executive authority of its own; but it is enabled to come to political decisions by reason of the inclusion of certain members of the Cabinet, who are armed with the executive authority attached to their offices.

The existence of the two political strata had resulted in an awkward predicament.

Fortunately the crisis did not reach such an acute stage as to make it necessary to consult the Cabinet in which the two political strata were even more strongly marked, and some of whose members, as our readers are now fully aware, were at that time unacquainted with the full extent of the military conversations which Mr. Haldane had undertaken, and in which serious differences of opinion might have been expected to arise.

For though the German General Staff, in August, had given the preliminary warning to officers and men of the reserve to hold themselves ready for the call, which is almost equivalent to a general mobilisation, it is probable that the Kaiser was opposed to war, and it is certain that M. Caillaux was determined to preserve peace. Consequently, in September the negotiations took a turn for the better, and on November 4 an agreement was arrived at under which France ceded to Germany 100,000 square miles of the Congo, adjacent to the Cameroons, yielded to her the right of pre-emption to Spanish Guinea, Corisco Island, and the Elobey Islands, and also abandoned the right of pre-emption to the Congo State obtained from King Leopold of Belgium in 1884, agreeing that any proposed change in the status of this State should be a matter of international agreement ; in return for which a French protectorate of Morocco was fully recognised. On November 16 M. Caillaux was able to commend this statement to his people, declaring that " the tricolour now waves on the shores of the historic Atlantis to demonstrate that in that African continent where ancient Rome, so strong in men and affairs, found her best troops, France will be able to develop in all security her undisputed Empire."

Thus, after many anxieties, and some vicissitudes, a happy ending was reached at last. Perhaps the Moors were disappointed. Perhaps they thought that France's faith in the Rights of Man, and our passion for small nationalities, were subject to a colour bar; perhaps they could not appreciate that a European war had been avoided, of which they would have been an unconscious cause.

VI

The settlement of Morocco produced effects and influenced events in many directions.

It left Anglo-German relations worse than they had ever been before. All parties in the Reichstag, from the Conservatives to the Socialists, regarded this treaty of November 4 as a diplomatic defeat.

Public opinion in Germany [wrote M. Jules Cambon in a dispatch to his Home Government on July 30, 1913], from December to May, from the columns of the Press of all parties, which reproached the Imperial Government for their incapacity and cowardice, has discovered, with surprise mingled with irritation, that the country conquered in 1870 had never ceased since then to carry on war, to float her flag, and maintain the prestige of her arms in Asia and Africa, and to conquer vast territories; while Germany, on the other hand, had lived on her reputation; that Turkey is the only country in which, during the reign of William II, she had made moral conquests, and those were now compromised by the disgrace of the Morocco solution. Each time that France made a colonial conquest this consolation was offered: "Yes, but that does not prevent the decadence, anarchy, and dismemberment of France at home." The public were mistaken, and public opinion was misled.

The agitation compelled the resignation of the Colonial Minister. When Bethmann-Hollweg in the Reichstag, in November, declared that the first object in sending the *Panther* to Agadir was to "protect the life and liberty of German subjects," that it was "therefore absolutely untrue for the Press at home and abroad to say that the sending of the ship was a provocation and a menace. Germany did not provoke and did not threaten," he was greeted with shouts of derisive laughter. The Crown Prince, from the royal box, in the course of the same debate, publicly applauded Herr Heydebrand, the leader of the Junkers, when he criticised in bitter terms the policy of the Imperial advisers, declaring that England had tried to involve them in war with France, and that they now saw "where the real enemy was to be found." Two days later the popularity of the Prince's action was shown when he received a tumultuous ovation from a crowded audience in a Berlin theatre.

Herr Kiderlen Waechter became the best-hated man in Germany, and even the Kaiser was not spared, for a Berlin paper, "The Post," ventured to refer to him as "ce poltron misérable" for the part he had played.

Its repercussion was felt in Italy. Italy had seen Spain and France fulfil their contemplated partition in Morocco, Germany obtain compensation elsewhere, and, remembering her

understanding with France on the subject, in September of 1911 suddenly launched a naked war of aggression to secure the annexation of Tripoli. This move interfered seriously with German Weltpolitik. Turkey enjoyed at this time the friendly protection of the Kaiser, who hoped to find in her a new Ally. Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance, her ties to which seemed to be weakening, for she was acting not only without consultation with Germany, but contrary to German interests. Nevertheless, Italy went her way, and after a desultory war secured the withdrawal of Turkey from Tripoli in October 1912. This war showed the weakness of Turkey and helped to produce the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913. Poor old Europe! So delicate was the balance of her alliances, ententes, and interests that a breath of wind was almost enough, at any time, to bring down the whole of the crazy structure of Peace.

The Moroccan Crisis also had its sequel in affairs at home. When it was over our Cabinet was made aware, for the first time, of the full extent of Mr. Haldane's military conversations and all that they involved; and the perfection of his arrangements, of which the *dix minutes d'arrêt* became the symbol, led to some strong criticism by Lord Morley and others. From now on the Cabinet as a whole fully realised the dangerous times through which they had passed, and great efforts were made to try to restore good relations with Germany. Incidentally, also, the Cabinet was reconstructed. It was discovered that the Welsh Disestablishment Bill was to be one of the principal legislative items of 1912. Ecclesiastical matters, according to precedent, belonged to the Home Office. Mr. McKenna was a Welsh member, keenly interested in this particular measure; he also possessed the additional qualification of having been, at one time in his career, called to the Bar. In October 1911, therefore, he was transferred to the Home Office. The suggestion was made that his place at the Admiralty should be taken by Mr. Haldane, who might be expected to organise a naval war staff on lines similar to that of the military general staff which he had created with so much success. But ultimately the choice fell on Mr. Winston Churchill, although, two years before, he had been a formidable critic of the Dreadnought policy.

Four years later, in a speech at Dundee on June 5, 1915, Mr. Churchill told his constituents that "he was sent to the Admiralty in 1911 after the Agadir Crisis had nearly brought us into war, and he was sent with the express duty laid upon him by

the Prime Minister to put the fleet in a state of instant and constant readiness for war in case we were attacked by Germany."

It is a difficult task to analyse the views which, up to this date, were held by Mr. Lloyd George. The facts, so far as we are permitted to know them, are in direct conflict. Mr. Harold Spender, a close and intimate friend, in his "Life" of Mr. Lloyd George—which, so far, has only been published in French—tells us that, one evening in 1908, during a visit to Germany, they sat together in the Orange Garden at Stuttgart and discussed "the possibility of a war between Britain and Germany, and that Mr. Lloyd George introduced the parallel between Rome and Carthage, and developed one of those views of the future which in other times would have passed as prophetic." "There is the same commercial rivalry," he said, "the same maritime jealousy, the same eternal quarrel between the soldier and the merchant, the warrior and the shopkeeper, the civilisation which has come and that which is still striving to come." Then he stopped and added: "I ask myself if we are not as ill prepared as Carthage. I ask myself if we are not equally distracted by factions."

"It is curious," Mr. Spender says, "to think to-day of the conversation in that brilliantly lighted garden, the pride of Stuttgart, with the vault of the stars above our heads and the murmur of a great town around us." Curious indeed, for as we have seen, only a few months before, on July 28, at the Queen's Hall, Mr. Lloyd George had seemed almost to subscribe to the German theory of "encirclement," and to the consequent justification of their fears; and only a few months later had opposed Mr. McKenna's naval programme, and warned Liberals, in the columns of the "Nation," of the danger that the revenue of his Budget might be absorbed in expenditure on armaments.

Possibly some echo of the conversation at Stuttgart was heard during the Constitutional Conference which sat in secret between the two General Elections in 1910, and tried to reach a settlement of the constitutional issue, by agreement. It is said that as a result of this Conference, in the course of which a wide range of topics must have been discussed, Mr. Lloyd George then proposed, and committed to writing, a scheme for a Coalition Government which would settle the question of the House of Lords and Home Rule, adopt some form of National Service, and finance the Navy by means of a loan. But the details of this scheme are only vaguely known and add to our confusion.

Possibly also the parallel of the history of Rome and Carthage had been in Mr. Lloyd George's mind when he made his speech at the Guildhall at the time of the Agadir Crisis. For Mr. Harold Spender tells us that, " Then, as to-day, nothing annoyed and irritated him more than the attitude of Germany towards France. ' It is pure persecution,' he said. He foresaw already the great dispute which was soon to distract the world." But again, as we shall see in later chapters, this seems to be inconsistent with the views which Mr. Lloyd George expressed on disarmament in January of 1914, his opposition to our intervention in August of the same year, until Belgium had been invaded, and his statement in 1915 that the war came to him as a great surprise.

It would be interesting to know whether in the doubly historic conversation in the garden at Stuttgart, the question of Morocco, by reason of its geographical proximity, was suggested by the mention of Carthage and formed any part of the parallel between ancient Rome and modern Germany.

CHAPTER IV

LORD HALDANE'S VISIT TO BERLIN

"I came away feeling uneasy."—Lord Haldane: Interview to the "Chicago Daily News," "Morning Post," April 2, 1915.

AFTER the Agadir Crisis the upper and lower political strata in the Cabinet were fully aware of each other's existence. Up to this time the lower stratum had, unknown to the upper, controlled events; but in doing so it had also discharged every liability due under the Anglo-French Entente. From now on the upper stratum gathered real momentum, and carried the lower stratum along with it.

The rank and file of Liberal members, and of the Liberal Party, had, for the most part, lived on the upper stratum. And though they were aware that there had been a "crisis," they were not aware of its extent, nor did they appreciate the significance of some of the things which leaked out subsequently. The vital facts were not, of course, disclosed until Sir Edward Grey revealed them to the House of Commons on August 3, 1914. Their policy was clear: they desired a good understanding with Germany, they knew of no reason why this could not be obtained; if there had been misunderstandings, let the past bury the past.

The National Liberal Federation, which consists of leading Liberals from all over the country, met at Bath on November 23 and 24, a fortnight after the agreement between France and Germany had been signed. The new spirit and the new policy seemed to pervade the whole following:

Every one who read the newspapers [said Sir John Brunner, whose age, great commercial position, and generous and large-minded philanthropy made him one of the most influential members outside the Cabinet], and more particularly those who had friends in Germany, knew that popular feeling in Germany, just now, was greatly excited. The German people believed that, in the discussions with France about Morocco, they had not got the best of the bargain. That did not please any proud nation, and their newspapers and their speakers had been declaring their minds

about this subject, more and more bitterly. But it had been a great comfort to him that the German Chancellor had rebuked those angry expressions, and had gone so far as to declare them to be stimulated by party feeling. . . . What I think about the matter [continued Sir John (we quote from the official report)] is that behind the German Chancellor there stood his mighty master, whose mind he spoke, and I am grateful that the German Emperor has used his influence for the protection of peace. An angry word from him would have opened the gates of hell. Now, as a lover of peace, a devoted and loving servant of my country, while an admirer of Germany, I tender my warm and grateful thanks to His Majesty. Will you join with me? ("Yes," and *applause*.) Will you declare your opinion? (*Renewed cheers*.) Those in favour of thanking the Emperor say "Aye." (A tremendous shout of "Aye" was the answer.) That vote was more unanimous than I have ever known in the House of Commons.

But it was generally agreed that, on this occasion, Sir John Simon, the young Solicitor-General, showed a capacity for saying the right thing, at the right time, and in the right way, which would soon give him a high place in the Liberal hierarchy, when he asked the delegates to send "to the German people this message":

We, holding as we believe, the opinions of vast masses of our countrymen, cannot tolerate the idea that there should be ill-feeling between them and us. The fellow-countrymen of Shakespeare and Milton cannot look askance at the fellow-countrymen of Goethe and Schiller; those who inherit the tradition of Wyclif and Wesley have no ground of quarrel with the descendants of Luther. Our industrial community, with its proud recollection of great scientific names like Newton and Darwin, cannot be so ignorantly foolish as to fail in appreciation of that great modern State which excels every other country in the world in the development of modern science.

This wish for a better understanding with Germany, if not the same fervent faith in its fulfilment, was common to both strata in the Cabinet. It seems also that similar views prevailed in high circles in Germany, for in January of 1912 there came an informal message from the Kaiser and Bethmann-Hollweg, through Herr Ballin, to Sir Ernest Cassell, which was conveyed by the latter to Mr. Winston Churchill, with whom he was on terms of great personal intimacy, to the effect that the Kaiser was much concerned at the state of feeling which was arising in both countries, and thought that the only hopeful method of

making things better was that the two Cabinets should converse directly with one another. Our Cabinet immediately adopted this proposal and decided that Lord Haldane should proceed at once to Berlin with full instructions, not to negotiate a treaty, but to explore the situation and bring back proposals *ad referendum*. No announcement was made to the Press of the proposed mission, but there was some leakage in Berlin; Lord Haldane was identified on his journey, and stocks on the Bourse even fell when it was announced that he had not come on a mission at all.

Lord Haldane arrived in Berlin on the morning of February 8, remaining there three days. He saw the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, at once, and the negotiations began.

The ice was broken by Lord Haldane introducing the thesis that Germany's great armaments had made her the centre of a powerful group, the natural and inevitable result of which was that other groups, in the interest of security, tended to come together. But that so far as we were concerned, now that the question of Morocco was out of the way, we had no agreements with Russia or with France, other than those which were in writing, and published to the world.

We had, it was true, made military preparations in the summer of 1911, but these were no more than were necessary to bring our arrangements for mobilisation up to something approaching the standard which in Germany was a mere matter of routine. We had such a direct interest that we could not sit by and contemplate even the possibility of France being crushed and her capacity to defend herself destroyed. The moment, however, now was propitious for a new departure, and there seemed to be no reason why we should not enter into a new and cordial friendship with Germany, carrying along with it our friendships with France and with Russia, to the mutual profit of all. Bethmann-Hollweg then suggested a formula of neutrality under which neither Germany nor ourselves were to enter into any combinations against the other. This formula, however, hardly stood examination as it left Germany free to fulfil her obligations to the Triple Alliance, and bound us to give no help, under any circumstances, to our friends in the Triple Entente, and the suggestion was made that both countries might be satisfied with mutual understandings against aggressive and unprovoked attacks, and aganist all combinations, military and naval agreements, and plans directed to the purpose of aggression and

unprovoked attack. Here again "aggression" was almost impossible of definition. But then it was the spirit that mattered, and, given the spirit, difficulties of expression would disappear.

From generalities, in which agreement seemed possible, Lord Haldane and Bethmann-Hollweg passed to realities, and the difficulties began: expressions of good-will would seem but a mockery if the new German Naval Law increased her battle fleet as against us, and we in our turn built more Dreadnoughts as a precaution against Germany. But then Admiral Tirpitz, and the Emperor too, were determined to have a third new squadron, and for this some new ships were a necessity. *If* only a way through this difficulty could be found! *If* only hearts could be changed and suspicions made to cease! What a vista of possibilities lay open before them! Lord Haldane was one of a Cabinet of Free Traders, believing that the development of German trade was no hindrance to our own; Germany and Britain might give each other the "open door"; the question of the Baghdad Railway might be settled; there were even commercial enterprises in our sphere of influence in Persia in which Germany might participate; in Africa there was still a world in which the two countries might extend civilisation side by side. If only Bethmann-Hollweg were master in his own Cabinet! if only there were no Admiral Tirpitz! if only the Kaiser had not been Queen Victoria's grandson and inherited a passion for the sea! Lord Haldane's first conversation ended with hope surrounded by "ifs." For he could hardly have been expected to take into consideration that, almost while he was speaking, Mr. Winston Churchill, on February 9, would be telling a Glasgow audience that while our Navy was a "necessity," the German Fleet was a "luxury," and urging the President of the Clyde Navigation Trust, who was present on his platform, "build your great dock, build it long, and build it deep, and, above all, build it wide, and we will provide you with no lack of great vessels to fill it."

II

The following day Lord Haldane lunched at the Schloss with the Kaiser, Admiral Tirpitz, and others. Luncheon over, the Kaiser, Tirpitz, and Lord Haldane withdrew to the Kaiser's study, and there, the Kaiser on one side of the table, Admiral Tirpitz on the other, and Lord Haldane at the head, a discussion,

sometimes in German, sometimes in English, sometimes in a mixture of both, began.

The German Navy required a third squadron; the fundamental law gave the Navy additional men only if and when ships were laid down; therefore ships must be laid down, or, at all events voted, or the men could not be obtained and the third squadron could not be produced. Hence the necessity for the new German Naval Law, hence the necessity for the original new programme of six additional Dreadnoughts, one for every year from 1912 to 1918, which, as it was, had been reduced to three, the first of which was to be laid down in 1912; moreover, Admiral Tirpitz had to safeguard the position of the Kaiser before the German public.

Always the same problem—the German Navy.

It was not difficult for Lord Haldane to point out that agreement and a new spirit in Anglo-German relations were bones without flesh, if they were inaugurated by Germany at once beginning to build new ships. The world would laugh, our own people would say they were being fooled. Could the law be dropped? No, that was impossible. Could at least one ship be dropped from the new programme? Equally distasteful to Admiral Tirpitz. Well then, could the time, within which the new ships were to be built, be spread? Could the first additional ship be postponed to 1913, the second to 1916, and the third to 1919? If only a political agreement could be reached and made public, might not the Kaiser then state to his subjects that this new fact modified his desire for the new Fleet Law and that the programme might be delayed and spread out? Just possible; although Admiral Tirpitz wanted some understanding about our own ship-building, and thought the two-power standard a hard one for Germany, which he was not willing to admit; while the Kaiser thought that a political agreement would have a profound effect on the retardation in ship-building, and he certainly would not wish, in this event, to go beyond the three additional ships. The agreement was the thing. *But* Admiral Tirpitz must have his third squadron. *But*, some additional German Dreadnoughts must be built, *but* British naval supremacy must remain unquestioned. The first day of Lord Haldane's negotiations had ended with hope surrounded by "ifs"; the interview now over concluded with possibilities encompassed by "buts."

On the evening of the same day Lord Haldane dined with Bethmann-Hollweg. Others were present, and only a few moments

of private conversation were possible. The German Chancellor was depressed at Lord Haldane's suggestion that the meagre character of Admiral Tirpitz's concessions would not be acceptable to his colleagues, or to British public opinion. He felt that if we could not meet them in the necessity of a new Fleet Law, the idea of an agreement would go to pieces, and what the result of failure would be was a matter of destiny.

The following day Lord Haldane again met Bethmann-Hollweg, and again pressed the point of the new German Naval Law; but, alas! it seemed only too clear that public opinion in Germany demanded a third squadron, and that some retardation in the building of new ships was the only possible concession. Nevertheless, both statesmen sat down at a table with pencils in their hands, and went on a wonderful voyage of discovery for what might be.

First of all, in search of a formula: mutual assurances of the desire of both countries for peace and friendship; negative declarations that neither Power would make any unprovoked attack upon the other, or join in any combination or design against the other, for purposes of aggression, or become a party to any plan or naval or military combination, alone, or in conjunction with any other Power, directed to such an end.

That if either Power became involved in a war, in which it could not be said to be the aggressor, the other would, at least, observe towards the Power so entangled, a benevolent neutrality, and use its utmost endeavour to localise the conflict, provided that such neutrality was reconcilable with existing agreements already made, and that new agreements, which rendered it impossible for either party to observe neutrality towards the other, were excluded.

A positive declaration that both Powers would do all in their power to prevent differences and misunderstandings between either of them and other Powers.

Then round different parts of the world, in which, if we may paraphrase Sir John Simon's eloquent words, the fellow-countrymen of Shakespeare and Milton, and those of Goethe and Schiller, the inheritors of the tradition of Wyclif and Wesley and the followers of Luther, the disciples of Newton and Darwin and those of Haeckel and Weissmann, might work and walk, in peace, together.

And then? A final shake of the hand and a reciprocal feeling that whether success or failure crowned their negotiations, two

honest and sincere-minded gentlemen had appreciated each other's difficulties and had made an effort to surmount them.

The ground explored, his mission over, Lord Haldane left Berlin to report the result to his colleagues. But he left with two serious misgivings in his mind : he had learned from private sources that Admiral Tirpitz had a formidable party behind him, that he might supersede Bethmann-Hollweg, and that ascendancy in policy would then fall into the hands of the war section in Germany. That the transient mood of the Kaiser, too, might pass, and that a change of Ministers might be impending ; he had also been given by the Kaiser a confidential advance copy of the new German Naval Law, and this, on examination, revealed a startling increase not only in battleships, in smaller craft, submarines, and *personnel*, but in the striking force of the German Navy.

Shadows were already beginning to fall, and in the story of the subsequent negotiations and their failure, we shall see, either, with one school of thought, the inevitable, or with Mr. Dawson, in his brilliant study of the " German Empire," one of the " tragic ' Too lates ' of international diplomacy."

III

The cynic will smile when he reflects that, although two General Elections in 1910 had established the rule of " the will of the people," the people were denied the adequate knowledge upon which that will must, presumably, be based. For even now we have been allowed to know but little of the negotiations carried on by our Government with Germany in 1912.

Immediately after Lord Haldane's return from Berlin, Mr. Asquith made a general statement in the House of Commons on February 14, 1912, in the course of which he said :

> It is an undoubted, as it is a most lamentable, fact that the traditional feeling of friendship and good-will between Germany and this country during the last few months has been seriously overclouded. When an atmosphere of suspicion has once been created, as all experience shows, fiction readily takes the place of fact, and legends, which at other times would be dismissed as incredible, are easily accepted and widely believed. We are told, for instance, that there are masses of people in Germany who firmly believe that at some time or times during the summer and autumn of last year we were meditating and even preparing for an aggressive attack upon their country, and that the movements of our Fleet were carefully

cultivated with that object in view. I am almost ashamed to have to contradict so wild and so extravagant a fiction. It is a pure invention. There is, I need hardly assure the House, not a shadow of foundation for it, nor was there anything anywhere or at any time of an aggressive or provocative character in the movements of our ships.

But the very fact that such rumours could find credence, not indeed, with the German Government, but in the minds of large numbers of intelligent and fair-minded people in Germany, is surely in itself a significant and most regrettable circumstance.

And, in referring to Lord Haldane's visit, he added :

There was perfect freedom of statement and frankness of explanation over a wide area of discussion. The very fact of such an interchange of views, under such conditions, should, in itself, we think, dispel the suspicion, wherever it still prevails, that either Government contemplates aggressive designs against the other. . . . I earnestly hope, however—and I go further and say I genuinely believe—that the conversations may have more than this merely negative result . . . in the course of my noble friend's visit there was unmistakable evidence of a sincere and resolute desire upon both sides to establish a better footing between us, without—let me make this perfectly clear—without on either side, in any way sacrificing or impairing the special relationships in which each of us stands to other Powers. In that spirit, and in the fresh light this interchange of views affords, both of us are now engaged in a careful survey of practical possibilities.

These sentiments were repeated by Bethmann-Hollweg in the Reichstag on the following day. And on February 16 Sir Edward Grey added that—

He had no fear that there would be any permanent estrangement between the public opinions of the two countries providing the truth got a fair chance. It was not difficult to tell the truth, the difficulty was to get the truth believed. It was quite easy to get something which was not the truth believed. Anybody could do that ; it was so common to human nature to prefer that which was exciting rather than that which was soothing.

As Lord Haldane had found in Berlin, both sides were ready enough to agree on generalities.

We presume that the negotiations then passed to real details, for we find that in introducing the Naval Estimates on March 18, Mr. Churchill produced a new formula which was to replace that of "Two Keels to One," by a standard of construction which would ensure us a 60 per cent. superiority in Dreadnoughts over

Germany, and, on the basis of this superiority, he proposed that both Germany and ourselves might, any year, take a "naval holiday," and cease from new construction.

> Take, as an instance of this proportion which I am putting forward for general consideration, the year 1913; in that year . . . Germany will build three capital ships, and it will be necessary for us to build five in consequence. Supposing we were both to take a holiday for that year; supposing we both introduced a blank page in the book of misunderstanding; supposing that Germany were to build no ships in that year; she would save herself between £6,000,000 and £7,000,000 sterling. But that is not all. We would not in ordinary circumstances begin our ships until she had started hers. The three ships that she did not build would, therefore, automatically wipe out no fewer than five British potential "Super-Dreadnoughts," and that is more than I expect them to hope to do in a brilliant naval action.

Presumably the idea of a naval holiday did not appeal to Admiral Tirpitz, for within a few weeks the new German Naval Law of 1912 was published. This new German law was ingenious, and even startling: it made no great additional proposals for new construction, but it almost amounted to a mobilisation of the entire German Navy. The navies of the world are not maintained, permanently, on a war footing. In our own Navy the practice had hitherto been only to maintain something like half its vessels on such a footing. But this law placed four-fifths of the entire German Navy on full and permanent Commission. And "this great fleet," as Mr. Churchill wrote in a memorandum for Mr. Borden, the Canadian Prime Minister, was not dispersed "all over the world for duties of commerce protection or in discharge of colonial responsibilities, nor was its composition and character adapted to those purposes. It was concentrated, and kept concentrated in close proximity to the German and British coasts."

Our reply was immediate: a supplementary estimate for a sum of £990,000 to be expended on submarines, aircraft, the acceleration of the building of light armoured cruisers, and reserves of armaments and munitions.

In asking for this additional sum over and above the estimates for the year, Mr. Churchill, on July 20, reviewed at length "the increase in the striking strength" of the German Navy, and dwelling on the "awful suddenness with which naval war can reach its decisive phase," justified the additional expenditure demanded by his supplementary estimate, and announced that

the Atlantic Fleet, hitherto based on Gibraltar, and other ships, hitherto based on Malta, would be withdrawn to home waters, so that the number of fully commissioned battleships concentrated in the North Sea might be increased. This was a substantial change in the strategic distribution of our fleet, but Mr. Churchill was able to give the assurance that the forces left in the Mediterranean would, "in conjunction with the Navy of France, of course, make a considerable force, superior to all possible combinations," his assurance being emphasised by Mr. Asquith's statement, made in the course of the debate, that "there had been no change of policy, but there had been a change, that had been going on now, for many years, in what he might call the strategical equilibrium."

There had indeed been a change in the "strategical equilibrium," for the British and the German Fleets were now being mobilised, almost in their entirety, and concentrated against each other in the North Sea. And the necessity of building additional ships had been avoided, by entrusting the defence of the Mediterranean to the joint care of French and British squadrons. Thus was defence against Germany made to coincide with the Liberal policy of retrenchment, and on this basis was a coalescence between the two political strata in the Cabinet, and a "new strategical equilibrium," achieved.

Nevertheless, it seems that the negotiations continued. Perhaps a search was made for the formula which had eluded Lord Haldane and Bethmann-Hollweg. Perhaps it was hoped that agreement in other directions might be followed by a revision of the Naval Law. Perhaps it was felt that Admiral Tirpitz and Bethmann-Hollweg were still wrestling for the soul of the Kaiser, and that victory, so far, rested with neither. For on July 25, three days after the introduction of Mr. Churchill's review of the new German Naval Law, and his statement of the steps taken to meet it, Mr. Asquith alluded to the recent appointment of the new German Ambassador, Marschall von Bieberstein, and to the less welcome conversations which had taken place in 1910 between the country of that eminent diplomatist and our Russian friends, in the following terms :

> We view without the least suspicion or dissatisfaction, on the contrary we view with equanimity, and with more than equanimity, such special conversations and interchanges of opinion as have taken place between Russia on the one side and Germany on the other, and so in the case of ourselves.

LORD HALDANE AND LORD MORLEY

Our relations with the great German Empire are, I am glad to say, at this moment—and I feel sure are likely to remain—relations of amity and good-will. My noble friend, Lord Haldane, the present Lord Chancellor, paid a visit to Berlin early in the year. He entered upon conversations and an interchange of views, there, which have been continued since in a spirit of perfect frankness and friendship, both on one side and the other, and in which, I am glad to say, we now have the advantage of the participation of a very distinguished diplomatist, in the person of the German Ambassador.

We have then to note, in passing, that Lord Roberts, pursuing his campaign for National Service, stated in a public speech at Manchester, on October 22 :

Now at the present day, in the year 1912, just as in 1866 and just as in 1870, war will take place the instant the German forces by land and sea are, by their superiority at every point, as certain of victory as anything in human calculation can be made certain. "Germany strikes when Germany's hour has struck." That is the time-honoured policy of her Foreign Office. That was the policy relentlessly followed by Bismarck and Moltke in 1866 and 1870 ; it has been her policy decade by decade since that date ; it is her policy at the present hour. And, gentlemen, it is an excellent policy. It is, or should be, the policy of every nation prepared to play a great part in history.

There were realists in this country as well as in Germany! And, after this, there is a silence, and we have to guess our way as to the course taken by the negotiations.

The reasons for their failure were given, more than two years later, in a speech made by Mr. Asquith at Cardiff on October 2, 1914, after the outbreak of the war :

In the year 1912 we laid down, in terms carefully approved by the Cabinet, and which I will textually quote, what our relations with Germany ought to be : we said, and we communicated this to the German Government, Britain declares that she will neither make nor join in any unprovoked attack upon Germany. Aggression upon Germany is not the subject and forms no part of any treaty, understanding, or combination to which Britain is now a party ; nor will she become a party to anything that has such an object. . . .

But that was not enough for German statesmanship. They wanted us to go further. They asked us to pledge ourselves absolutely to neutrality in the event of Germany being engaged in war—and this . . at a time when Germany was enormously increasing both her aggressive and defensive resources, especially upon the sea.

They asked us for a free hand, so far as we were concerned, if and when they selected the opportunity, to dominate the European world. To such a demand but one answer was possible, and that was the answer we gave.

But the answer thus given to Germany made it necessary that an answer should also be given to France. And on August 4, 1914, Sir Edward Grey revealed to the House of Commons that on November 22 and 23 of 1912, the following letters passed between the French Ambassador and himself :

November 22, 1912.

MY DEAR AMBASSADOR,

From time to time in recent years the French and British naval and military experts have consulted together. It has always been understood that such consultation does not restrict the freedom of either Government to decide at any future time whether or not to assist the other by armed force. We have agreed that consultation between experts is not, and ought not, to be regarded as an engagement that commits either Government to action in a contingency that has not yet arisen and may never arise. The disposition, for instance, of the French and British Fleets respectively at the present moment is not based upon an engagement to co-operate in war.

You have, however, pointed out that, if either Government had grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third Power, it might become essential to know whether it could, in that event, depend upon the armed assistance of the other.

I agree that if either Government had grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third Power, or something that threatened the general peace, it should immediately discuss with the other, whether both Governments should act together to prevent aggression and to preserve peace, and if so, what measures they would be prepared to take in common.

Yours etc.,

E. GREY.

November 23, 1912.

DEAR SIR EDWARD,

You reminded me in your letter of yesterday, November 22, that during the last few years the military and naval authorities of France and Great Britain had consulted with each other from time to time ; that it had always been understood that these consultations should not restrict the liberty of either Government to decide in the future whether they should lend each other the support of their armed forces ; that on either side, those consultations between experts were not, and should not be considered, as engagements binding our Governments to take action in certain eventualities ; that, however, I had remarked to you that, if one or other of the two Governments had grave reasons to fear an unprovoked attack

on the part of a third Power, it would become essential to know whether it could count on the armed support of the other.

Your letter answers that point, and I am authorised to state that, in the event of one of our two Governments having grave reasons to fear, either an act of aggression from a third Power, or some event threatening the general peace, that Government would immediately examine with the other the question whether both Governments should act together in order to prevent the act of aggression or preserve peace. If so, the two Governments would deliberate as to the measures which they would be prepared to take in common; if those measures involved action, the two Governments would take into immediate consideration the plans of their general staff and would then decide as to the effect to be given to those plans.

Yours, etc.,
PAUL CAMBON.

Another interpretation of the facts contained both in Mr. Asquith's speech and in the letters we have quoted above, indeed a possible connecting link between the contents of all of them, can be found in a report, presumably from a German Embassy, dated March 1913, in which a copy of these two letters was enclosed, and which was published in the "North German Gazette" on October 16, 1914, and in the German "official documents relating to the outbreak of the war."

The meshes of the net into which French diplomacy is succeeding in entangling England are steadily growing narrower. Even in the first phases of the Morocco conflict, England, as is known, made concessions of a military nature to France, which have in the meantime developed into concrete agreements between the general staffs of both countries.

In regard to the agreements concerning a co-operation at sea, I learn, from a generally well-informed source, the following.

The English Fleet will protect the North Sea, the English Channel, and the Atlantic Ocean, in order to make it possible for France to concentrate her naval forces in the western basin of the Mediterranean, in connection wherewith Malta is placed at her disposal as a naval base. Details arrange for the employment of French torpedo flotillas and submarines in the Channel, and of the English Mediterranean squadron, which, on the outbreak of war, is to be placed under the command of the French Admiral.

. . . . . .

I obtain, from a special source, knowledge of an exchange of Notes which took place in the autumn of the preceding year between Sir Edward Grey and Ambassador Cambon, and which, with the request that it be employed in strict confidence, I have the honour to submit to you herewith. In the exchange of Notes the British and French Governments

agree, in the case of an attack threatened by a third Power, to enter at once into an exchange of views as to whether joint action was indicated to repulse the attack, and in that event as to how and to what extent the existing military arrangements should be made use of. The form of the agreements is calculated in such a way that the latter shall be in technical conformity with British neutrality. England does not, formally, assume in any manner the duty of furnishing military help. Under the wording she retains a free hand to act at all times in accordance with the demands of her own interests.

It hardly requires, however, any special amplification to show that England, through these compacts, in conjunction with the military arrangements made, has already pledged herself *de facto* beyond redemption to the French *Revanche* idea.

The British Government is playing a dangerous game. Through its policy in the Bosnian and Moroccan questions, it has evoked crises which have twice brought the world to the verge of a war. The encouragement which it gives to French Chauvinism, directly and indirectly, can one day lead to a catastrophe, in which English as well as French soldiers will pay their blood on French battle-fields for the British policy which aims at the isolation of Germany.

The seed sown by King Edward is sprouting.

CHAPTER V

COMPLICATIONS : FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE

"The fire smouldering in the forest of Europe was beginning to burst into flames. In vain did they try to put it out in one place : it only broke out in another. With gusts of smoke and a shower of sparks it swept from one point to another, burning the dry brushwood.

"Already in the East there were skirmishes as the prelude to the great war of nations. . . .

"The world felt that it was at the mercy of an accident that might let loose the dogs of war. The world lay in wait. The feeling of inevitability weighed heavily upon the most pacifically minded. . . .

"Only a Napoleonic genius could have marked out a chosen and deliberate aim for this blind onward rush. It was as though the world had chosen the most mediocre to be its governors. The force of the human mind was in other things—so there was nothing to be done but to trust to the declivity down which they were moving. This both governors and governed were doing. Europe looked like a vast armed vigil."—*Romain Rolland, "Jean Christophe,"* 1912.

I

BY a curious paradox, although the negotiations in 1912 had ended, as we have seen, in failure, our relations with Germany continued nevertheless steadily to improve.

While the Great Powers had been occupied with their own troubles, the little States in the Balkan Peninsula had been forming amongst themselves a series of alliances and ententes not unlike, in their delicate balance, those that were prevailing in the rest of Europe. The annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Turkish Revolution, the war between Turkey and Italy over Tripoli, had shown the weakness of Turkey ; the failure of Russia to help her Serbian Ally at the time of the Bosnian crisis, and of Germany to adjust the difference between her Italian Ally and Turkey, had shown the impotence of the Great Powers. "Les grandes Puissances ? Dîtes plutôt les grands impuissants ! " was a saying attributed to King Ferdinand of Bulgaria at the time.

In October 1912, therefore, the new Balkan Alliance determined to strike a blow for themselves, and declared war against Turkey. The result was immediate and decisive. The Bulgarians routed the Turkish Army at Kirkilisse and Lule Burgos, pursuing them until they rallied behind the fortified lines of

Tchataldja. On November 8 the Greeks entered Salonika. On November 18 the Serbians occupied Monastir, and a few days later the Albanian seaport of Durazzo. Turkey sued for peace, and the belligerents, other than Greece, concluded an armistice on December 3. In the same month, and at the request of Sir Edward Grey, a conference of Ambassadors met in London to try to arrange terms of peace.

The victory of the Christians over the Turks had been so decisive that it was calculated to give the Great Powers more immediate concern than durable satisfaction. Their interests required the maintenance of the *status quo* in the Balkans. A strong Balkan Federation was unacceptable to Germany, for it destroyed the Pan-German *Drang nach osten*; it also threatened Russian ambitions to reach Constantinople and dominate the straits of Gallipoli; it imperilled the very existence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, for the Austrian Serbs would soon be drawn into it.

Austria, therefore, refused Serbia her window on the Adriatic, mobilised her Army, and forced the Serbs to evacuate the Durazzo and other ports. Italy, as recent events now make us understand, preferred to side with a decrepit Austria rather than a young Serbia. Germany in "shining armour" stood, once again, by Austria's side. France and ourselves had no real interest in the Balkans, which were included in Russia's department in the combination of the Triple Entente. And although, of course, France was bound by the terms of her Alliance, in certain events, to fight by the side of Russia if called upon to do so, she was not enthusiastic at the prospect. Sir Edward Grey, in his anxiety to preserve the peace, supported in many instances the Austrian claims.

Serbia, therefore, subjected to pressure from Russia, retired from the Adriatic. Turkey was pressed to make concessions of territory which were embodied in the Treaty of London of May 13, 1913. This Treaty, however, was never ratified, for Bulgaria, disappointed at the terms of the settlement, fell on Serbia and Greece. While the issue between Serbia and Greece on the one side and Bulgaria on the other seemed doubtful, Roumania suddenly attacked Bulgaria from the north, and Bulgaria was decisively defeated. Turkey was then able to take Adrianople and retrieve some of the concessions she had made. Again the European Concert met, revised the terms of their former proposals, and completed the Treaty of Bukarest on August 10, 1913.

In the course of these conferences British and German statesmen worked closely and harmoniously together in the interests of peace. Speaking in the Imperial Diet on April 7, 1913, Bethmann-Hollweg paid a remarkable tribute to Sir Edward Grey :

> Europe will know [he said] how to thank the British Foreign Secretary for the extraordinary devotion and spirit of conciliation with which he has conducted the discussions in the Ambassadors' Conferences in London, and has already succeeded in adjusting differences of opinion. Germany shares in these thanks, all the more willingly since we know that we are at one with the aims of British policy, and, while remaining faithful to our Allies, have worked with her on the same lines. . . . It seems to me that the mutual confidence which has for so long been absent, to the detriment of both countries and the world, is beginning to return.

These good relations continued. Prince Lichnowsky's memorandum, which was published in 1917, shows that an agreement was reached and initialled in August 1913 with reference to the Portuguese colonies in Africa, in which German interests were generously considered; but that the German Government would not agree to its publication, in consequence of which Sir Edward Grey's signature was withheld. The question of the Baghdad Railway was taken up, negotiations continued in 1913 and 1914, and a settlement of a far-reaching character arrived at. Prince Lichnowsky declares in the same pamphlet that if " these agreements had been concluded and published, an agreement would have been reached with England, which would finally have ended all doubt of the possibility of an Anglo-German co-operation."

Nevertheless, at the close of the second Balkan War there were signs which were less favourable and even ominous.

The Treaty of Bukarest had left no one satisfied. Serbia had secured a large extension of territory, sufficient to raise hopes and ambitions of a greater Serbia which would one day include their fellow Slavs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even other Slavs in other territories under Austrian rule; but Russia had been unable to secure her protégé the coveted window on the Adriatic. Austria had seen her Bulgarian Ally despoiled, and the Serbian victories excite grave unrest amongst her Slav populations. Greece and Serbia could not fail to see that what they had taken from Bulgaria was theirs only until Bulgaria was strong enough to retake it. Italy and Austria had conflicting claims in Albania, which were likely to lead to embittered relations. The Turkish Army—a potential German Ally—had

been defeated and crushed. While, possibly, the diplomatic honours rested with the Triple Alliance, on balance, their military strength was seriously diminished.

In addition, the gulf which had been created between Russia and Austria, by the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, had grown wider and wider. The Pan-Slav movement was growing, and the Pan-Slavs were the main prop of the unstable Russian autocracy. The maintenance of Austrian authority over the medley of races which constituted the Austro-Hungarian Empire seemed to hang, as if on a single thread, on the life of the aged Emperor. A Slav uprising, an act of aggression by Austria, the death of Franz Josef, was calculated, at any moment, to precipitate a conflict, in which issue would be joined between Teuton and Slav. And in this event, behind Austria apparently under all circumstances, thanks to the folly of German statesmanship since the days of Bismarck, stood the German Emperor in "shining armour," and by the side of Russia, under the terms of her military alliance, stood the Republican armies of France. Some indication of the possibilities which existed is shown by the disclosures made by Signor Giolitti, on December 5, 1914, to the Italian Chamber, when he revealed that on August 9, 1913 (the day before the Treaty of Bukarest was signed), Austria had communicated to Italy and to Germany "her intention of taking action against Serbia," and had defined such action "as defensive," hoping to bring into operation "the *casus fœderis* of the Triple Alliance."

The Great Powers, or their evil genius, had transferred the witches' cauldron from Morocco to the Balkan Peninsula.

There were not wanting other signs which were equally ominous. While during 1912 and 1913 Germany and ourselves had been tending to come together, Germany and France had been drifting further apart. Large masses of the German people saw the Empire of the French constantly expanding, while the German Empire struggled and sweated for an inferior place in the sun, and they could never forgive what seemed to them the French victory in Morocco. And France, under the popular Presidency of M. Poincaré, was going through a "patriotic" phase in which Alsace-Lorraine was not forgotten.

In June 1913 the German Army was increased, at once, by 4,000 officers, 15,000 non-commissioned officers, and 117,000 men, under a scheme which fixed the ultimate peace strength of the Army at 870,000. But while this reorganisation could not be

carried out under several years, the money necessary for the whole of the scheme was raised at once by a special tax, to be held—until it was needed. France replied by increasing her Army by a rigid enforcement of a three years' service law, and a loan of £40,000,000. Russia proceeded to accelerate the re-equipment of her Army. In these preparations the optimist saw only the preposterous premiums to be paid for the insurance of peace ; the pessimist and the realist the approach of Armageddon.

On November 23, 1913, M. Jules Cambon, the French Ambassador at Berlin, wrote the following warning to his Government :

I have received from an absolutely reliable source an account of a conversation which took place a fortnight ago between the Emperor and the King of the Belgians, in the presence of the Chief of the General Staff, General von Moltke. This conversation, it appears, has made a profound impression on King Albert. . . .

The person addressed by the Emperor had thought up till then, as did all the world, that William II, whose personal influence had been exerted on many critical occasions in support of peace, was still in the same state of mind. He found him this time completely changed. The German Emperor is no longer in his eyes the champion of peace against the warlike tendencies of certain parties in Germany. William II has come to think that war with France is inevitable, and that it must come sooner or later. Naturally, he believes in the crushing superiority of the German Army, and in its certain success.

General von Moltke spoke exactly in the same strain. He, too, declared war to be necessary and inevitable ; but he showed himself still more assured of success, " For," he said to the King, " this time the matter must be settled, and your Majesty can have no conception of the irresistible enthusiasm with which the whole German people will be carried away when that day comes."

The King of the Belgians protested that it was a travesty of the intentions of the French Government to interpret them in that sense, and to let oneself be misled, as to the sentiments of the nations, by the ebullitions of a few irresponsible spirits, or the intrigues of unscrupulous agitators.

The Emperor and his Chief of the Staff nevertheless persisted in their point of view.

During the course of this conversation the Emperor moreover seemed overstrained and irritable. As William II advances in years, family traditions, the reactionary tendencies of the Court, and especially the impatience of the soldiers, obtain a great empire over his mind. Perhaps he feels some slight jealousy of the popularity acquired by his son, who flatters the passions of the Pan-Germans, and who does not regard the position occupied by the Empire as commensurate with its power. Perhaps the reply of France to

the last increase of the German Army, the object of which was to establish the incontestable supremacy of Germany, is, to a certain extent, responsible for his bitterness, for, whatever may be said, it is realised that Germany cannot go much further.

One may well ponder over the significance of this conversation. The Emperor and the Chief of the Staff may have wished to impress the King of the Belgians, and induce him not to make any opposition in the event of a conflict between us. Perhaps Germany would be glad to see Belgium less hostile to certain aspirations lately manifested here with regard to the Belgian Congo ; but this last hypothesis does not seem to me to fit in with the interposition of General von Moltke.

For the rest, the Emperor William is less master of his impatience than is usually supposed. I have known him more than once to allow his real thoughts to escape him. Whatever may have been the object of the conversation related to me, the revelation is none the less of extreme gravity. It tallies with the precariousness of the general situation and with the state of a certain shade of opinion in France and in Germany.

If I may be allowed to draw a conclusion, I would submit that it would be well to take account of this new factor, namely, that the Emperor is becoming used to an order of ideas which were formerly repugnant to him, and that, to borrow from him a phrase which he likes to use, "We must keep our powder dry."

II

The improvement which had taken place in the relations between Germany and ourselves produced a feeling, not merely of optimism, but of positive enthusiasm amongst a large section of Liberal members. It seemed to them to justify all that they had said and even all that they had hoped.

There remained, however, in their minds some uncomfortable memories of the "naval scare" to which their leaders had yielded in 1909, and even suspicions of what had taken place at the time of the Agadir Crisis; added to which there was a feeling of uncertainty as to what our understanding with France really meant, and, owing no doubt, to some leakage from the letters which had passed between Sir Edward Grey and M. Cambon, in November 1912, it was whispered that this understanding involved definite military obligations.

These suspicions, however, were soon set at rest : for, in the course of the debate on the Address in the House of Commons, on March 10, 1913, the following colloquy took place between Lord Hugh Cecil and Mr. Asquith :

LORD HUGH CECIL: The right honourable gentleman and his colleagues are generally believed—I speak with the utmost diffidence in regard to allegations which may not be well founded—to have entered into an arrangement, or, to speak more accurately, to have given assurances, which, in the contingency of a great European war, would involve heavy military obligations on this country. We do not suspect the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary of pursuing anything but a pacific foreign policy, and we are far from saying that this policy is in any way an aggressive one; but certainly we believe, if the stories current are true, the policy, if it is not to be regarded as an aggressive one, is adventurous.

THE PRIME MINISTER: Will the noble Lord define a little more definitely what he means?

LORD HUGH CECIL: I am only anxious not to use words which will convey anything but perfectly fair criticism, in a matter of this sort, and any ambiguity in what I have said is due to the fact that I do not wish to go beyond the necessities of the case.

THE PRIME MINISTER: I do not complain.

LORD HUGH CECIL: There is a very general belief that this country is under an obligation, not a treaty obligation, but an obligation arising owing to an assurance given by the Ministry, in the course of diplomatic negotiations, to send a very large armed force out of this country to operate in Europe. This is the general belief. It would be very presumptuous of any one who has not access to all the facts, in the possession of the Government——

THE PRIME MINISTER: I ought to say that is not true.

LORD HUGH CECIL: I am very glad to have elicited that explanation. It is certainly widely believed that the Government have engaged in a military policy of an adventurous kind, and I certainly think, if that is right, that it would involve very important considerations, when you come to consider what are the military resources of this country.

And on March 24, 1913, in reply to a question from Sir William Byles, the well-known pacifist, Mr. Asquith was able to state that—

This country was not under any obligation, not public and known to Parliament, which compelled it to take part in any war. In other words, if war arose between European Powers, there were no unpublished agreements, which would restrict or hamper the freedom of the Government, or of Parliament, to decide whether or not Great Britain should participate in a war. The use that would be made of the naval and military forces, if the Government and Parliament decided to take part in any war was, for obvious reasons, not a matter about which public statements could be made.

Further assurances followed. On April 4, 1913, Mr. Runci-

man declared at Birkenhead "in the most categorical way," that we had no secret understanding with any foreign Power which would involve us in a European war. A month later, on May 3, Mr. Harcourt told his constituents, and possibly also some of his colleagues in the Cabinet, that "he could conceive no circumstances in which continental operations would not be a crime against the people of this country." On June 28 Mr. Acland, who filled the important post of Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, reiterated that "we were, of course, concerned in many European questions, but in no European question were we concerned to interfere with a big army. Our mission was to help to preserve peace, and in order to do that we must be known to be the friends of all."

As the months went by hopeful assurances ever grew in volume.

In the summer of 1913 Mr. Hirst, the editor of the "Economist," published a pamphlet entitled "The Six Panics," in which it was shown that there was as little foundation for the "naval scare" of 1909 as for like "scares" in the past, and in which the Naval Estimates were severely criticised and roundly denounced. This pamphlet was honoured by a preface from Lord Loreburn, who had held the post of Lord Chancellor in the Liberal Cabinet from 1906 until his retirement, due to ill-health, at the end of 1912.

> Time will show [he wrote]' that Germans have no aggressive designs against us, nor we against them; and then foolish people will cease to talk of a future war between us, which will never take place. . . . That any British Government would be so guilty towards our country as to take up arms in a foreign quarrel is more than I can believe. To say so appears to me to be a duty, not less to ourselves, than to foreign Powers.

As the winter approached, Lord Haldane, in his new capacity of Lord Chancellor, paid a flying visit to Montreal to deliver an address to the American Bar Association. This address was directed to the possibility of conciliation between nations, the theme being that we were reaching the stage at which we should hope that the Entente between the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, on the one hand, and that which existed between Germany and Austria on the other, might develop into a still larger Entente, in the spirit of which we might hope for, and find the best, in other nations; thus bringing about a form of *Sittlichkeit* which would provide a firmer basis for international law, and reverence for international obligations, in the rights

and duties of other nations. "The barbarism," he said, "which once looked to conquest and the waging of successful war as the main object of statesmanship, seems as though it were passing away."

The Atlantic breezes seem to have swept away the misgivings which Lord Haldane had felt when he left Berlin in February of 1912, for, on his return home, he told one audience, on November 24, that "he could assure the meeting that the Continental chiefs of staffs were mostly rational persons, who were much less keen over the invasion of other countries than was generally supposed"; another, on December 1, that "our relations with Germany were twice as good as they were two years ago. Others had done the main part in securing that: he could only say he had striven hard"; and yet another, on January 15 of the following year, that "Europe was an armed camp, but an armed camp in which peace not only prevailed, but in which the indications were that there was a far greater prospect of peace than ever there was before."

It was spring-time all the year round on the upper political stratum in 1913, and it seemed to be carrying the lower stratum along.

III

The cumulative effect of the statements and assurances to which we called attention in our last section was to revive, as a matter of course, the agitation in opposition to Naval Estimates, which ever since 1909 had been carried on, intermittently, by the Labour Party and by a group of Liberal members who enjoyed the tacit approval of a large number of their colleagues. A similar agitation was being carried on in the Cabinet, some hint of which was conveyed by Mr. Churchill, when in the course of his speech at the Guildhall, on November 10, 1913, he stated that "next year it would be his duty—if he should continue to be responsible for this important department of the State—to present to Parliament estimates substantially greater than the enormous sums originally voted in the present year."

The indication thus given of increased estimates fanned the flames of the agitation. Liberals had seen their worst fears come true. Mr. Lloyd George had warned them when, in the columns of "The Nation" in 1909, he had predicted that "an-

other concerted effort would be made to rouse a fresh naval and military panic, so as to rush the Government into the criminal extravagance of unnecessary armaments on land and sea." The Government—their own Liberal Government—had indeed been "rushed." Naval Estimates had increased every year, carried by arguments which seemed invariably to be falsified by subsequent events; and by a curious paradox it had been easier for a Liberal Government, aided by the strength of the party machine, and assured of the support of a "patriotic" opposition, to carry them than it would have been for a Conservative Administration, faced by united Labour and Liberal opposition. The "Free Breakfast-table" had become an empty dream; hopes of social reform were fast receding into the background. The great Budget of 1909, which had only been carried at the cost of a constitutional revolution, had proved to be an "Armour Plate" Budget after all. The Labour Party was solid in its opposition to armaments, and was consequently attracting some of the most earnest and devoted Liberals to its ranks. The General Election could not be very long delayed.

Added to this, party feeling was at its height. The Conservative Party had thrown itself body and soul on the side of armed rebellion in Ireland, and was even accused of having tried to "seduce" the army. All the forces of reaction were thought to be in favour of increases in the Army and Navy, with the deliberate purpose of bankrupting social reform. Labour "unrest" was not only chronic, but dangerous, and there seemed to be a revolt of the proletariat throughout Europe against preparations for a war which they did not desire, and which they thought to be impossible.

Under these circumstances, the National Liberal Federation met at Leeds, on November 26 and 27, and passed with unanimity a resolution which viewed "with great anxiety the continued growth in armaments, which, unless checked must inevitably lead to an increase in taxation," and, after expressing a "most earnest hope that, in view of the conspicuous improvement in the relations between Great Britain and foreign Powers, no opportunity would be lost in continuing to press forward friendly negotiations with those Powers," recommended the abolition of the right of capture of private property at sea in time of a war as a means by which reduction in the Naval Estimates might be secured.

It so happened that, on the closing day of their proceedings,

the delegates, in this frame of mind, were addressed by Mr. Asquith. He was able to administer but little comfort.

> We are charged [he told them], with a solemn trust, and in its performance it is our duty to maintain a vigilant watch on what the rest of the nations are doing, and to have always steadily and constantly in view the world-wide interests of which, for the time being, we are stewards. . . . I believe myself that every growing stress and strain of new taxation and of swelling indebtedness may accomplish, may succeed in accomplishing, what philanthropists and idealists have so far failed to do. Speaking for my colleagues and myself, what I say to you is, that you may rest assured that we shall seize eagerly every opportunity that we can discover or create, to promote a concerted alleviation of the burden and waste which press upon the hopes and the aspirations of mankind.

These words were coldly received, and somewhat damped the enthusiasm of the meeting. Even the "Liberal Magazine," which is the official organ of the Liberal "machine," while it was able to say that it had "rarely been the lot of a Liberal Prime Minister to address an audience so thoroughly representative of the rank and file of the Liberal Party, and never had a Prime Minister received from such a gathering a more enthusiastic endorsement of his policy and his leadership," was constrained also to remark, "that, in fairness, it must be stated that whilst the delegates were in good heart and excellent spirits, they were unmistakably anxious and perturbed as to the growing amount spent on armaments, and as to the threatened increase in the near future."

Further evidence of this anxiety and perturbation was furnished by the fact that, at the close of the year, the indefatigable Sir John Brunner circularised all the Liberal Associations, and asked every one of them "which believed in the good old Liberal doctrines of peace, retrenchment, and reform, to pass resolutions before the end of January in favour of reductions in our armament expenditure, so that the Government might have fresh evidence of the wishes of the party, before the Naval and Military Estimates for the next year were finally settled"; and that this appeal met with a favourable and widespread response.

Mr. Churchill's well-informed biographer, Mr. Maccallum Scott, tells us in his sketch of "Winston Churchill in Peace and War," that at this time his hero's "principal opponent" in the Cabinet was Mr. Lloyd George, a view for which there is ample evidence. For on New Year's Day of 1914 Mr. Lloyd George "allowed to be published" in the "Daily Chronicle" the record

of a "conversation," in which he developed his views on armaments, on policy, and also his hopes for the future.

This "conversation" began by Mr. Lloyd George telling his interviewer that if our national military expenditure had remained at the figure which in 1887 Lord Randolph Churchill had regarded "as being bloated and profligate," there would have been a saving equivalent to four shillings in the pound in local rates, or, reckoning the saving in terms of imperial taxes, "the whole of the duties on tea, sugar, coffee, and cocoa would have been swept away, and the income tax reduced to twopence in the pound."

Passing from these alluring possibilities, he proceeded to give three reasons why he thought that the present was the "most favourable moment for twenty years" which had presented itself for overhauling our expenditure in armaments:

First. That our relations with Germany were infinitely more friendly then than they had been for years.

Second. That Continental nations were directing their energies more and more to the strengthening of their land forces. . . .

The German Army was vital, not merely to the existence of the German Empire, but to the very life and independence of the nation itself, surrounded, as Germany is, by other nations, each of which possesses armies as powerful as her own. We forget that, while we insist upon a 60 per cent. superiority (so far as our naval strength is concerned) over Germany, being essential to guarantee the integrity of our own shores—Germany herself has nothing like that superiority over France alone, and she has, of course, in addition, to reckon with Russia on her eastern frontier. Germany has nothing which approximates to a Two-Power Standard. She has, therefore, become alarmed by recent events, and is spending huge sums of money on the expansion of her military resources.

Having regard to this:

He felt convinced that, even if Germany ever had any idea of challenging our supremacy at sea, the exigencies of the military situation must, necessarily, put it completely out of her head.

Under these circumstances, it seemed to him that we could afford, just quietly, to maintain the superiority we possessed at present, without making feverish efforts to increase it any further. The Navy was then, according to all impartial testimony, at the height of its efficiency. If we maintained that standard no

one could complain, but if we went on spending and swelling its strength we would wantonly provoke other nations.

Thirdly. The third reason was the most hopeful of all. It was the spread of the revolt against military oppression throughout the whole of Christendom, certainly throughout the whole of Western Europe. Events in France and Germany had shown the same temper among the people of those lands as was manifested at the meeting of the National Liberal Federation at Leeds.

The interview closed with the exordium that the present "was a propitious moment for reconsidering the question of armaments, and, unless Liberalism seized the opportunity, it would be false to its noblest traditions, and those who had the conscience of Liberalism in their charge would be written down for all time as having grossly betrayed their trust."

Our readers will not fail to note, in this "conversation," a remarkable similarity and consistency with the views previously expressed by Mr. Lloyd George in his speech to the "Peace Society" on July 28, 1908, and in his article in "The Nation" on October 30, 1909. Those who search for inconsistency can find it in his speech at the Mansion House on July 21, 1911, at the time of the Agadir Crisis, and in the historic conversation with Mr. Harold Spender on the parallel between Rome and Carthage, in the Orange Garden at Stuttgart in the late summer of 1908. While, we think, an explanation of the speech can, perhaps, be found in the fact that Mr. Lloyd George on this occasion was speaking for a department, and using words other than his own, we must leave it to Mr. Harold Spender to reconcile the discussion in 1908 in "that brilliantly lighted garden . . . with the vault of the stars above their heads, and the murmur of a great town around them," and the "conversation" on New Year's Eve in 1913, with a less exhilarating companion, amidst the less stimulating surroundings of Criccieth.

CHAPTER VI

THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR

Out of a Balkan dispute had thus grown a world-war, but of this unparalleled catastrophe the Balkan dispute was not the cause, but only the occasion.—*W. H. Dawson, "The German Empire."*

I

IT is a curious fact that the outbreak of wars have been frequently preceded by prophecies, made by the best-informed persons, of the likelihood of the continuance of peace. In February of 1792, twelve months before the beginning of the revolutionary wars, Mr. Pitt moved to reduce the Naval Estimates, on the ground that "unquestionably there never was a time, in the history of this country, when, from the situation of Europe, we might more reasonably expect fifteen years of peace, than at the present moment." In the beginning of 1870 there was a debate in the Prussian Parliament on disarmament, and when Lord Granville succeeded Lord Clarendon at the Foreign Office, on July 6 of the same year, he was informed by Mr. Hammond, the permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, that never during his long experience had he known "so great a lull in foreign affairs, and that the aspect of Europe was unusually peaceful." On November 9, 1902, a year before the outbreak of war between Russia and Japan, Mr. Balfour had stated that "he knew not that any danger within the ken of human vision menaced, in the smallest degree, that peace which it should be our earnest endeavour to preserve."

Similarly, in 1914 the year opened, as we have seen, with a strong movement on the part of the Liberal Party for a reduction of the Naval Estimates, with Mr. Lloyd George at its head, and supported by his statement that, "our relations with Germany were infinitely more friendly than they had been for years," and that the present was "the most favourable moment for twenty years to overhaul our expenditure on armaments."

This movement grew in volume, and a deputation of Liberal members and of Trade Unionists met Mr. Asquith in private to urge their views upon him, only to come away dissatisfied and disappointed. However, in the result, the Navy estimates of £51,550,000 were voted in March without any great upheaval, and although only thirty-seven members went into the Division Lobby against them, an appreciable number of Liberal members satisfied their consciences, a government majority being assured without their support, by abstaining from voting on either side. By this time political interest had shifted rapidly from "Disarmament" to the question of Ireland. For it is a feature of our parliamentary system that political attention can only be concentrated on one question at a time, and by March the Liberal ranks were closed to fight for their Home Rule Bill.

During the first months of 1914 the opposition to the Liberal Government had been carried to almost hysterical lengths. When the Parliament Bill had been passed in 1911, Mr. Bonar Law, the Leader of the Opposition, had accused Liberals of "having bought their majority by corruption" and of being "gamblers who were ready to load the dice." Mr. Austen Chamberlain had spoken of "a revolution nurtured in lies, promoted by fraud, and only to be achieved by violence." Mr. Balfour had accused Mr. Asquith of having been guilty of "a felon blow," "a political crime," and of having given a "traitor's advice to the Sovereign." From words the Opposition had passed to deeds: the weakness of the Liberal Executive had permitted volunteers in Ulster to be drilled and armed in open rebellion, and the threat of armed resistance had received the formal and unanimous support of the whole of the Unionist Party.

On April 24 the Ulster volunteers carried through their famous gun-running *coup*, and again the Liberal Executive exposed its impotence and declined to act. The possibility that the Army might be used to put down disorder in Ulster was followed by a movement approaching to a threat of mutiny among many officers in the Army, including an officer of considerable standing in Sir Henry Wilson, which led to the Curragh incident, and to which General Seely, whose genial manners rather than his strength of character or abilities had secured him the succession to Lord Haldane at the War Office, practically surrendered, and Mr. Asquith was forced to become Secretary of State for War, as the only way out of the *impasse* which had been created.

As a last resort, a conference of political leaders was summoned to meet at Buckingham Palace on July 21, under the Presidency of the Speaker, to try to arrive at a settlement by consent. This Conference was opened by the King himself, who told its members that "for months, we have watched with deep misgivings the course of events in Ireland. The trend has been surely and steadily towards an appeal to force, and to-day the cry of Civil War is on the lips of the most responsible and sober-minded of my people," and, having spoken of the possibility of a European crisis in grave words which were not reported, urged them to try to find a solution.

However, on July 24 the Conference broke up, having failed to come to an agreement, and on July 26 another gun-running *coup* was carried out, on this occasion by the Nationalist Volunteers.

These events were closely followed by Baron Kuhlman from the German Embassy, and also excited great interest in Germany. And, according to Mr. Gerard, the American Ambassador in Berlin, the authorities in Germany accepted them as evidence that we might be powerless to intervene in the event of a European War. But the Buckingham Palace Conference was hardly over when the coming crisis at home was swallowed up by the greater crisis abroad.

II

Ever since the date of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria, a strong nationalist movement had been carried on in these two provinces by the Serbs, a movement which, as we have seen, had been strengthened by the Serbian victories in the Balkan wars, and had given rise to much anxiety in Austria as to future Serbian designs. Some indication of the dreams which were being cherished by the Serbians is furnished by the fact that, although June 28—the anniversary of the battle of Kossovo, in which the mediæval Serbian kingdom had been annihilated by Sultan Murad I, had been kept as a day of mourning for more than five hundred years, in 1914, "Kossovo Day" was being celebrated in Belgrade as a national fête to commemorate the Serbian victories in the Balkan wars, which had restored old Serbia and the town of Kossovo itself.

By a singularly unhappy choice, the Archduke Franz Ferdi-

nand, nephew and heir of the Emperor of Austria, had chosen this day to visit Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. In the course of his progress through the town, accompanied by his wife, the Duchess of Hohenberg, Gabrilo Prinzip, "a nervous, silent, hard-working student," threw a bomb at their automobile, killed both the Archduke and his consort, and added another tragic episode to the family history of the aged Emperor.

Sympathy for Austria was widespread and universal ; but while from June 28 to July 23, on which latter day an Austrian ultimatum was sent to Serbia, the Austrian Press used unbridled language and called for condign punishment on Serbia, we know little of what took place between these dates. We have only scanty evidence of the complicity of the Serbian Government in the murders. We have no details of the extent of the Slav agitation in Bosnia and Herzegovina which excited so much alarm in Austria. There is evidence that some of the German hierarchy saw and approved the contents of the Austrian ultimatum ; there is also some evidence that a Crown Council met at Potsdam on July 5, under the Presidency of the Kaiser, and decided that the moment had come for war. Whether these things be true or not, on July 23 Austria sent an ultimatum to Belgrade, which, in the shape of ten demands, required the elimination from Serbian national life of everything which was hostile to the Austrian Empire.

The events which followed were crowded into twelve fateful days.

III

In the official "introductory narrative of events" of the various diplomatic correspondence and statements, which was published by the Foreign Office, after the outbreak of the war, we are told that soon after the murder of the Archduke, "both the British and also the German Government knew that the peace might be disturbed."

But it would seem that whatever the fears of the Foreign Office might have been, at this stage, the danger of a European War was not generally appreciated by the Cabinet. For on July 23, the day on which the Austrian ultimatum was sent to Serbia, Mr. Lloyd George, in the House of Commons, referred again to the hope, if not the certainty, of a reduction of armaments in the near future, and dealt with one aspect of the diplo-

matic position in the following terms: "Take a neighbour of ours; our relations are very much better than they were a few years ago. There is none of that snarling which we used to see, more especially in the press of those two great, I will not say, rival nations, but two great Empires. The feeling is better altogether between them. They begin to realise that they can co-operate for common ends, and that the points of co-operation are greater, more numerous and more important than the points of possible controversy. All that is to the good."

These words were hardly spoken before the possibility of a grave crisis became apparent.

On the afternoon of Saturday, July 25, although Serbia had returned to Austria a reply which amounted to an acceptance of all the Austrian demands which were consistent with her independent sovereignty, the Austrian Minister left Belgrade that evening, and Serbia ordered a general mobilisation. On July 25 Sir George Buchanan, our Ambassador at Petrograd, had telegraphed to Sir Edward Grey that "Russia could not allow Austria to crush Serbia and become the predominant Power of the Balkans, and, if she felt secure of the support of France, she would face all the risks of war." On the preceding day France had indicated that she would fulfil all her military obligations to Russia, while no one doubted that Germany was ready to fight on the side of her Austrian Ally, and military writers had for some years agreed that in the event of a war in which France, Germany, and Russia were involved, Belgium would be the topographical victim of the right wing of the German Army.

In view of these ominous facts and possibilities various attempts were then made to avert the catastrophe of a European War.

Austria having professed that she would take no territory from Serbia, Russia declared that while she would intervene if Serbia were attacked, she would use all her influence to induce the Serbian Government to give satisfaction to Austria, and asked Austria to give time for deliberation. Austria declined and declared war on Serbia on July 28. Russia replied by ordering a partial mobilisation on the following day.

In the meantime Sir Edward Grey, mindful of the successful part he had played during the Balkan wars, had suggested that the German, Italian, and French Ambassadors should meet in London and try to find a solution. This proposal was refused by Germany, who suggested direct negotiations between Russia

and Austria, which, as we have seen, were cut short by the Austrian declaration of war against Serbia.

Thus, by Wednesday, July 29, the search for a formula had failed, Austrian troops were bombarding Belgrade and Russia had ordered a partial mobilisation.

On this day Sir Edward Grey telegraphed to our Ambassador in Berlin suggesting that if the German Government did not approve of his proposed Conference of Ambassadors, they should suggest any other form of mediation they pleased. "Mediation," he said, "was ready to come into operation by any method that Germany thought possible, if only Germany would press the button in the interests of Peace." In reply to this appeal, Bethmann-Hollweg, who had just returned from Potsdam, sent for Sir Edward Goschen late that night, and asked him if Great Britain would remain neutral in a war, provided Germany did not touch Holland and took nothing from France but her Colonies. And although, in the course of the interview, he declined to give any undertaking that Germany would not invade Belgium, he promised that if Belgium remained passive, no territory would be taken from her.

The search for a formula continued, but behind its screen, under the exigencies of modern war, preparations for mobilisation went steadily forward.

It would seem that the question of our intervention did not come to a head until July 30. On July 29 Sir Edward Grey had warned Prince Lichnowsky that "the situation was very grave. While it was restricted to the issues at present actually involved we had no thought of interfering in it. But if Germany became involved in it, and then France, the issue might be so great that it would involve all European interests; and he did not wish him to be misled by the friendly tone of their conversation . . . into thinking that we should stand aside."

On July 30 M. Cambon saw Sir Edward Grey, reminded him of the letters which had passed between them in November of 1912, and asked him "what we should do if certain circumstances arose, . . . the particular hypothesis" which M. Cambon had in his mind being "an aggression by Germany on France," which he anticipated "would take the form of either a demand that France should cease her preparations, or a demand that she should engage to remain neutral if there was a war between Germany and Russia, neither of which things could France admit."

Historians and diplomatists will dispute for many years to

come as to whether, if we had then declared that in the events foreshadowed by M. Cambon, we should intervene on the side of France, there was not a last desperate chance that war might have been averted. In her interesting life of Sir Robert Morier, his daughter, Lady Wemyss, records his opinion that "there are certain moves on the political chess-board which necessarily lead to checkmate, and good players did not go on playing after these had been examined." Consequently, in Morier's opinion, we might have averted the Franco-German War in 1870 by the threat of our intervention, for "there was one thing known positively to every one who had to do with European politics during the last fifteen years, which was that Louis Napoleon would not face a coalition between England and Germany."

It is, of course, impossible to say whether the situation in 1914 constituted a converse parallel to that which, according to Morier, existed in 1870, or whether the statesmen in Germany, in 1914, would come within his definition of "good players" who would have considered the certainties of our intervention (distracted as we were by internal strife) as a move which must eventually lead to "checkmate." But it is difficult to read the diplomatic correspondence or study the events which followed without thinking that, on July 30, both Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Asquith felt that the moment for our intervention had come, and that this was the right move to play. However, on Thursday, July 30, and for several days afterwards, any suggestion of intervention on our part was not "practical politics"; the division of opinion in the Cabinet made it quite impossible. For until the following week the upper stratum of the Cabinet, under the powerful leadership of Mr. Lloyd George, were in a majority and were entirely opposed to our intervention, which was only supported by a lower stratum consisting of Mr. Asquith, Sir Edward Grey, Lord Haldane, Lord Crewe, Mr. Churchill, Mr. McKenna, and Mr. Runciman.

"The Saturday after war had actually been declared on the Continent," said Mr. Lloyd George in an interview which was published in "Pearson's Magazine" in March 1915, "a poll of the electors of Great Britain would have shown 95 per cent. against embroiling this country in hostilities. Powerful city financiers, whom it was my duty to interview this Saturday, ended the Conference with an earnest hope that Great Britain would keep out of it."

Meanwhile we can gather from the diplomatic correspondence

something of the anxiety which this attitude was causing to M. Cambon: on July 30 he reported to his Home Government that "Sir Edward Grey understood his feelings perfectly, and thought as he did that the moment had come to consider and discuss together every hypothesis." On July 31 he reported again that, "having asked Sir Edward Grey concerning the Cabinet which had taken place that morning," Sir Edward Grey had replied "that, after having examined the situation, the Cabinet had thought that, for the moment, the British Government were unable to guarantee us their intervention, that they intended to take steps to obtain from Germany and France an understanding to respect Belgian neutrality, but that before considering intervention it was necessary to wait for the situation to develop." Although M. Cambon was able to add that at the close of the interview, Sir Arthur Nicholson, the permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, had told him "that the Cabinet would meet again the following day, and confidentially gave him to understand that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs would be certain to renew the discussion."

In the meantime things had, for a moment, taken a hopeful turn. On July 29 Germany had suggested to Austria that she should be satisfied as soon as her troops had occupied Belgrade, and late on the same night Russia offered to stop all military preparations if Austria would recognise that her conflict with Serbia had become a question of general European interest and would eliminate from her ultimatum the proposals which involved a violation of Serbian sovereignty. It seems that Austria was then ready to repent of her hasty action, and willing to agree that the whole question of her ultimatum to Serbia should be the subject of a discussion.

At the eleventh hour there was some hope that peace might be maintained.

There is still a conflict of evidence upon which a final judgment can only be pronounced when the evidence in the Kaiser's trial is available, as to whether, during the whirl of these last negotiations, a general and not a partial mobilisation was in fact taking place in Russia, before July 31, and whether this, or the fear of it, or deliberate policy, induced Germany on July 31 suddenly to dispatch an ultimatum to Russia, demanding that she should countermand her mobilisation within twelve hours. On whichever side of the controversy truth may lie, this action destroyed the last chance of peace. For on the following day

both France and Germany began to mobilise, in the afternoon of the same day the German Ambassador at Petrograd presented a declaration of war, and war between Germany, Russia, France, and Austria became inevitable.

By July 31 France's appeal for our intervention had become more insistent. On this day M. Cambon presented to King George a personal appeal in the form of an autograph letter from President Poincaré.

In this letter the President stated that "from all the information which reached him it would seem that war would be inevitable if Germany were convinced that the British Government would not intervene in a conflict in which France might be engaged," but that, "if, on the other hand, Germany were convinced that the Entente Cordiale would be affirmed, in case of need, even to the extent of taking the field side by side, there would be the greatest chance that peace would remain unbroken."

"It is true," added M. Poincaré, "that our military and naval arrangements leave complete liberty to your Majesty's Government and that, in the letters exchanged in 1912 between Sir Edward Grey and M. Paul Cambon, Great Britain and France entered into nothing more than a mutual agreement to consult one another in the event of European tension, and to examine in concert whether common action were advisable.

"But the character of close friendship which public feeling has given in both countries to the Entente between Great Britain and France, the confidence with which our two Governments have never ceased to work for the maintenance of peace, and the signs of sympathy which your Majesty has ever shown to France, justify me in informing you quite frankly of my impressions, which are those of the Government of the Republic of France."

The letter concluded with the request that "Your Majesty will excuse a step which is only inspired by the hope of seeing the European balance of power definitely reaffirmed."

Nevertheless, the division in the Cabinet still continued. For King George was only able to reply to M. Poincaré, on the following day, in non-committal terms that, "as to the attitude of my country, events are changing so rapidly that it is difficult to forecast future developments; but you may be assured that my Government will continue to discuss freely and frankly any point which might arise of interest to our two nations with M. Cambon."

IV

In order to keep to the chronology of our narrative, it is now necessary to interpose the story of a movement which was developing from another direction, and which can be read in greater detail in the August number of the "National Review" of 1918.

The great events to which we have referred, and the division in the Cabinet with regard to them, had been followed, not unnaturally, with interest and anxiety by other important and influential persons.

On Saturday morning, August 1, the situation had been discussed at a breakfast party at 7, Draycott Place, between General Sir Henry Wilson, who had, with Marshal Foch, been largely responsible for perfecting the arrangements for a possible co-operation of French and British troops, Mr. Amery, a rising Unionist member of Parliament, Mr. Leo Maxse, the well-known editor of the "National Review," and others.

"It was a most melancholy little company," Mr. Leo Maxse tells us, which "foregathered round the hospitable board of General and Mrs. Wilson. . . . At first they were speechless. They simply hung their heads. England was to look on while Germany attacked France—such was the policy." And "No one could see daylight until one of their number suggested bringing in the Unionist Opposition to save the situation."

This suggestion was at once adopted, and after some "comings and goings" in the course of which their fears were more or less confirmed by M. Cambon, and after the intervention of other important persons, Lord Edmund Talbot, the Unionist Chief Whip, was able to collect some of the Unionist leaders, who were for the most part spending their "week-end" out of London, to meet and discuss the position that night.

As a result of these activities, on Saturday night the Unionist leaders, Lord Lansdowne, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Bonar Law, the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Edmund Talbot, who were joined later in the evening by Sir Henry Wilson and Mr. George Lloyd, met at Lansdowne House. Unfortunately, we are unable to chronicle what took place at this momentous Council. Though, according to Mr. Maxse, "General Wilson is understood to have played a conspicuous part, thanks to his intimate knowledge of the military problem as also of the *liaison* between France and Great Britain, who had learnt to look to one another for support in such

an eventuality as had now arisen," Mr. Maxse adds, "it was vital that we should instantly rally in full naval and military strength, as the Unionist Leaders realised. They acted accordingly."

On the following Sunday morning, Lord Lansdowne, reinforced by Mr. Austen Chamberlain who had arrived in London too late for the Conference at Lansdowne House, called on Mr. Bonar Law with the draft of a letter which they suggested should be sent to Mr. Asquith. According to Mr. Maxse, Mr. Bonar Law "demurred to the draft of his colleagues, sat down at his own table, and wrote an alternative, which can only be described as classic," which ran as follows:

DEAR MR. ASQUITH,

Lord Lansdowne and I feel it our duty to inform you that, in our opinion, as well as that of all the colleagues whom we have been able to consult, it would be fatal to the honour and security of the United Kingdom to hesitate in supporting France and Russia at the present juncture, and we offer our unhesitating support to the Government in any means they may consider necessary for that object.

Yours very truly,
A. BONAR LAW.

August 2, 1914.

This letter was then taken in Lord Lansdowne's motor-car to No. 10, Downing Street, where the Cabinet was still in session, shortly after midday.

V

On Sunday, August 2, the division in the Cabinet still rendered any decisive attitude on our part impossible. For on that day M. Cambon, having asked "about the violation of Luxembourg" which had taken place in the early morning, Sir Edward Grey explained to him in reply "the doctrine on that point laid down by Lord Derby and Lord Clarendon in 1867." And when M. Cambon asked further "what we should say about the neutrality of Belgium," Sir Edward Grey was only able to say that "that was a much more important matter; they were considering what statement they should make in Parliament the following day—in effect, whether they should declare a violation of Belgian neutrality to be a *casus belli*." But, apparently, in spite of differences of opinion, the Cabinet had been able by this time

SIR EDWARD GREY

to agree on a formula for a limited intervention. For Sir Edward Grey gave M. Cambon an undertaking that "if the German Fleet came into the Channel, or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against the French coasts or shipping, the British Fleet would give all the support in their power."

The circumstances under which the Cabinet was persuaded to give this undertaking—we have seen that in 1912 a "new strategical equilibrium" had been established in the Mediterranean—were given on the following day by Sir Edward Grey to the House of Commons.

The French Fleet is now in the Mediterranean, and the northern and western coasts of France are absolutely undefended. The French Fleet, being concentrated in the Mediterranean, the situation is very different from what it used to be because the friendship which has grown up between the two countries has given them a sense of security that there was nothing to be feared from us.

The French coasts are absolutely undefended. The French Fleet is in the Mediterranean and has for some years been concentrated there because of the feeling which has existed between the two countries. My own feeling is that, if a foreign fleet, engaged in a war which France had not sought, and in which she had not been the aggressor, came down the English Channel and bombarded and battered the undefended coasts of France, we could not stand aside and see this going on practically within sight of our eyes, with our arms folded, looking on dispassionately, doing nothing. I believe that would be the feeling of the country. There are times when one feels that if these circumstances actually did arise, it would be a feeling which would spread with irresistible force throughout the land. . . .

If we say nothing at this moment, what is France to do with her Fleet in the Mediterranean? . . . . If we say nothing it may be that the French Fleet is withdrawn from the Mediterranean. We are in the presence of a European conflagration; can anybody set limits to the consequences that may arise out of it?

Nobody can say that in the course of the next few weeks there is any particular trade route the keeping open of which may not be vital to this country. What will be our position then? We have not kept a fleet in the Mediterranean which is equal to dealing alone with a combination of other fleets in the Mediterranean. It would be the very moment when we could not detach more ships to the Mediterranean, and we might have exposed this country from our negative attitude at the present moment to the most appalling risk. I say that from the point of view of British interests. We feel strongly that France was entitled to know—and to know at once—whether or not, in the event of attack upon her unprotected northern and western coasts, she could depend upon British support.

There are some facts with regard to this incident which are still obscure and even conflicting. On Monday, August 3, the German Ambassador sent a communication to the Press, which was published in the "Manchester Guardian" and the "Westminster Gazette," to the effect that if England remained neutral, Germany would give up all naval operations on the French coast. It would seem that this undertaking was considered favourably by Mr. Lloyd George and the "non-interventionists" in the Cabinet as a formula, under which our intervention might be avoided. For in the interview published in "Pearson's Magazine" to which we have already referred, Mr. Lloyd George told his interviewer: "But this I know is true—after the guarantee given that the German Fleet would not attack the coast of France, or annex any French territory, I would not have been a party to a declaration of war, had Belgium not been invaded; and I think I can say the same thing for most, if not all, my colleagues."

Sir Edward Grey, on the contrary, did not accept this undertaking in quite the same spirit, and he cannot be included in the number of "most, if not all, Mr. Lloyd George's colleagues." For, in the course of his speech in the House of Commons on August 3, 1914, Sir Edward Grey stated: "Fresh news comes in, and I cannot give this in any very formal way; but I understand that the German Government would be prepared, if we would pledge ourselves to neutrality, to agree that its Fleet would not attack the northern coast of France. I have only heard that shortly before I came to the House. But it is far too narrow an engagement for us."

However, divisions in the Cabinet, Lord Morley and Mr. John Burns having resigned, soon ceased to exist, and it is probable that by Monday, August 3, salvation and unity had almost been found on the question of Belgian neutrality. Though as far as we can gather from the published diplomatic correspondence, the non-interventionists were either unable or unwilling to formulate a positive undertaking of unconditional neutrality on our part, if Germany would undertake not to violate Belgian territory or resort to naval operations against the coast of France.

But those members of the Cabinet who thought that both honour and interest required our intervention must have been well aware that for some years the French General Staff, no less than our own, had regarded it as certain that in the event of a European war, the right flank of the German Army would

attack France through Belgium, and had based their joint preparations on this hypothesis. They were, therefore, no doubt, well content to accept the formula that the invasion of Belgium should be treated as a *casus belli*, keep the Cabinet united, and await events. For, as Mr. Lloyd George told an interviewer subsequently—we quote again from the interview in "Pearson's Magazine"—whereas

"On Saturday . . . a poll of the electors would have shown 95 per cent. against embroiling this country in hostilities," by the following Tuesday a transformation had been effected inasmuch as on that day, "a poll would have resulted in a vote of 99 per cent. in favour of war; and the city interests which knew that our participation in a great European war would mean heavy loss and might bring ruin on them, and were, therefore, on Saturday morning unanimously opposed to war, by Tuesday were quite as unanimously in favour of it."

"What had happened?" asked Mr. Lloyd George, "in the meantime?"

"The Colonies were there on Tuesday; so was the trade and the shipping and the commerce; all the selfish inducements were quite as potent on Tuesday as they were on Saturday. The revolution in public sentiment was attributable entirely to an attack made by Germany on a small and unprotected country which had done her no wrong; and what Britain was not prepared to do for interests political and commercial, she readily risked to help the weak and the helpless.

"Our honour as a nation is involved in this war, because we are bound in an honourable obligation to defend the independence, the liberty, the integrity of a small neighbour that has lived peaceably. The man who declined to discharge his debt because his creditor is too poor to enforce it is a blackguard. . . .

"If Germany had been wise," he concluded, "she would not have set foot on Belgian soil. The Liberal Government then would not have intervened. Germany made a grave mistake."

In the course of the afternoon of Monday, August 3, the Cabinet learnt that at seven o'clock on the preceding evening Germany had sent a Note to the Belgian Government, to which a reply within twelve hours was demanded, requiring a friendly neutrality to cover a free passage for German troops through Belgian territory, and promising in return, the maintenance of their independence and the possession of their kingdom after the conclusion of peace. On August 4 we sent an Ultimatum to Germany demanding an assurance that Belgian neutrality should be respected, and at 11 o'clock on the same evening a state of war existed between Germany and ourselves.

The Armed Peace had come to an end.

VI

In bringing our story up to the outbreak of the War, we have concluded our sketch of the high policy pursued by the Liberal Government, and the part played in that policy by Mr. Lloyd George from 1906 to 1914. During these eight years, Mr. Lloyd George lived in what we have described as the upper or "pacificist" stratum (we do not use the word "pacificist" as a term of reproach) of the two strata into which, as we have shown, the Cabinet was divided. And it would seem that for some months the recollection of those days, so happy in their hopes, and even in their expectations, so unhappy in their diagnosis of the position in Europe, lingered in Mr. Lloyd George's memory. For an echo of them can be heard in a speech made by him on June 23, 1915.

> Germany [he then told the House of Commons] had been preparing for years. . . . She had been piling up materials. Until she was ready she was on the best terms with every one. We all recollect the great Balkan crisis. Nothing could have been friendlier than the attitude of Germany. Nothing could have been more retiring, more modest, or more unpretentious. It was always "after you." She did not want to push herself to the front at all. She had a benevolent smile for France. She treated Russia as a friend and a brother. She smoothed down all the susceptibilities of Austria. She walked arm-in-arm with Great Britain through the Chancelleries of Europe, and we really thought that, at last, the era of peace and good-will had dawned. At that moment she was forging and hiding up immense accumulations of war stores to take her neighbours unawares, and murder them in their sleep.

Four years of war produced great changes in Mr. Lloyd George's psychology and even in his memory. And judging from another speech, made three years later in the House of Commons, on August 7, 1918, it is evident that the action of Germany no longer seemed, in retrospect, quite so unexpected as it seemed three years before, and that he had then discovered reasons, almost as cogent as the invasion of Belgium, for our intervention. We quote from the official Parliamentary Report:

> We had a compact with France, that, if she were wantonly attacked, the United Kingdom would go to her support.
>
> *Mr. Hogge:* We did not know that.
>
> *Mr. Lloyd George:* If France were wantonly attacked——
>
> *An Hon. Member:* That is news.

Mr. Lloyd George: There was no compact as to what force we should bring into the arena. In any discussion that ever took place, either in this country or outside, there was no idea that we should ever be able to supply a greater force than six divisions. . . . Whatever arrangements were come to I think history will show that we have more than kept faith.

And when, in the course of the debate, the statement as to there being "a compact with France" was challenged, Mr. Lloyd George read the letter written by Sir Edward Grey to M. Paul Cambon on November 22, 1912, with which our readers are familiar, and modified his original statement in the following words:

I think the word "compact" was too strong to use in that connection. In my judgment it was an obligation of honour. It was an indication that if there were an unprovoked attack—I used the words "wanton attack," practically the same thing—if there were an unprovoked attack, then we were prepared to discuss with France the method of coming to her assistance. I think the phrase "obligation of honour" would be a more correct description of what actually took place rather than the word "compact," and it certainly was not a treaty. I had nothing in my mind except that letter when I spoke, and I think the matter ought to be put right at once.

An obligation of honour is sometimes difficult to define, and generally impossible to enforce. And it would seem that the idealism created by the war grew stronger in Mr. Lloyd George's heart as the war was drawing to a close, and led him to construe such an obligation more strictly, in August of 1918, than he was inclined to do during the anxious and distracting days at the end of July and the beginning of August of 1914. Or, perhaps, the earthquake occasioned by the War had caused the upper political stratum to subside, and brought Mr. Lloyd George to the lower stratum at last?

PART II

THE WAR

"Germany had been preparing for years . . . she had been piling up materials. Until she was ready she was on the best terms with every one. We all recollect the great Balkan crisis. Nothing could have been friendlier than the attitude of Germany. Nothing could have been more retiring, more modest, or more unpretentious. It was always 'after you.' She did not want to push herself to the front at all. She had a benevolent smile for France, she treated Russia as a friend and a brother. She smoothed down all the susceptibilities of Austria. She walked arm-in-arm with Great Britain through the Chancelleries of Europe, and we really thought that, at last, the era of peace and good-will had dawned. At that moment she was forging and hiding up immense accumulations of war stores to take her neighbours unawares and murder them in their sleep."—*Mr. Lloyd George's Speech in the House of Commons on June 23, 1915.*

"We have been made the subject, in the last eight or nine years, just in the same way as France was before 1870, and Austria was before 1866, and Denmark was before 1864, of careful, deliberate, scientific, military reconnaissance. Well, we knew all about it."—*Mr. Winston Churchill's Speech at Liverpool on September 21, 1914.*

CHAPTER VII

FIRST MONTHS OF THE WAR

"Lord Kitchener's personal qualities played at this time a very great part in the decision of events. His prestige and authority were immense. He was the sole mouthpiece of War Office opinion in the War Council. Every one had the greatest admiration for his character, and every one felt fortified amid the terrible and incalculable events of the opening months of the war by his commanding presence. He was never, to my belief, overruled by the War Council or the Cabinet in any military matter, great or small. . . . Scarcely any one ventured to argue with him in Council. Respect for the man, sympathy for him in his immense labours, confidence in his professional judgment, and the belief that he had plans deeper and wider than any we could see, silenced misgivings and disputes whether in the Council or at the War Office. All-powerful, imperturbable, reserved, he dominated absolutely our counsels at this time."—*Mr. Winston Churchill: Evidence before the Dardanelles Commission.*

DURING the first months of the war public attention was concentrated on the first shock of the opposing armies in France and Belgium, and on the great expectations which were entertained of a successful Russian advance on East Prussia and Galicia.

It would seem that the French General Staff, as well as our own, anticipated an invasion of France through Belgium and the southern valley of the Meuse, and that their joint plans had intended that their northern armies should hold up the German advance until a French offensive in Lorraine had materialised. The Belgians were expected to assist, maintaining their armies at Namur and in advance of Antwerp, while our expeditionary force was to form the connecting link between the French and the Belgian Army of the coast.

In his interesting analysis of the "First Forty Days in 1914," General Maurice has shown how these plans miscarried: how General Joffre under-estimated the strength of the German forces by which he was likely to be opposed, particularly the strength of the German right wing, which included the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Armies under Kluck, Bülow, and Hansen, and which consisted of no less than thirty-two divisions, or nearly half of the German forces on the Western Front; and how he was unaware, until August 15, that large forces were moving westwards through

Liège, and did not realise their full strength until August 21. This unexpected strength of the German forces was secured by the rapid formation and mobilisation of thirteen "hidden," or reserve corps, followed soon after by four additional ones, and by leaving only four active corps, with a number of reserve formations, on the Eastern Front.

Thus the right wing of the German Armies was able to force the line of the Meuse with comparative ease. The French offensive in Lorraine failed. The Germans advanced through Belgium, with a wider sweep than had been anticipated, both north and south of the Meuse, captured Namur, severed the link between the Belgian coastal army and our own, and marched on Paris, with the French and British Armies in full retreat before them.

Meanwhile the Russians had met with what appeared to be a startling success.

While their main attack was directed against Austria, the armies of Rennenkampf and Samsonoff had been thrown rapidly on East Prussia, in order to relieve the position of the Allies on the West. On August 7 Rennenkampf defeated Von François at Insterburg, while on the 20th Samsonoff defeated the 20th German Corps at Frankenau, drove it back on Insterburg, and in a few days the greater part of East Prussia was in Russian hands.

"In its first battles," wrote Colonel Reppington, in "The Times," on August 29, "the Russian Army has displayed splendid vigour, and a capacity for the offensive exceeding all expectations. Remembering the seasons, and all they mean, Russia must reach Berlin within a couple of months, and if, at the end of that time, our claws are still fast in the German Armies on the West, and Serbia has still her teeth in Austria's back, the strategical and political objects of the war will soon be achieved."

Then came a change of fortune almost as dramatic as that which was soon to be effected in the West in the battle of the Marne. On August 22 General Ludendorff had received his "call to the East." On August 23, on the platform of Hanover Station, he met General Hindenburg for the first time, under whom he had been ordered to serve as Chief of the Staff of the 8th Army in East Prussia, and thus began the famous partnership which lasted through four eventful years.

The details of what followed must be read in Ludendorff's own memoirs. How "gradually during the period from August 24 to 26 the battle plan took shape in all its details," how Hinden-

burg and he ventured on one of the greatest gambles in military history by leaving " only the thinnest screen of cavalry to oppose Rennenkampf," then, having concentrated the " entire strength of the German Army in East Prussia " against Samsonoff, won the decisive battle of Tannenberg, destroyed or captured an army of 200,000 men, and freed East Prussia almost with one blow.

But while Hindenburg and Ludendorff had followed up their victory at Tannenberg with another, though lesser, victory over Rennenkampf at the battle of the Masurian Lakes, and were beginning an offensive on Poland, General Joffre had brought his long retreat to an end, taken the offensive, and, in the decisive battle of the Marne, flung back the German advance on Paris.

The battle of the Marne was succeeded by the battle of the Aisne. On September 13 and 14, the Allied Armies crossed the river, abandoned the idea of a frontal attack on the strong positions by which they were faced, and attempted, instead, to turn the German right flank. During the course of the fighting in this battle Lord French, in his " 1914," describes how, as—

" Day by day the trench fighting developed, he came to realise, more and more, the much greater relative powers, which modern weapons had given to the defence," and that " he began dimly to apprehend what the future might have in store for us." " Presently," he adds, " came Manoury's great effort to turn the German right flank. I witnessed one day of this fighting myself with General Manoury, and came back hopeful. Alas! those hopes were not fulfilled. Afterwards we witnessed the stupendous efforts of de Castelnau and Foch, but all ended in the same trench! trench! trench! I finished my part in the battle of the Aisne, however, unconverted, and it required the further and more bitter lesson of my own failure, in the north, to pass the Lys River, during the last days of October, to bring home to my mind a principle in warfare of to-day, which I have held ever since, namely, that, given forces fairly equally matched, you can ' bend ' but you cannot ' break ' your enemy's trench line."

This effort having met with failure on October 3, the British Army began to evacuate its positions on the Aisne, and move to Flanders. Then followed a race between the two armies to extend their lines to the North Sea, which ended in a dead-heat. And by November 21 the desperate attempt by the Germans to smash their way through to the Channel ports had been defeated in the first battle of Ypres.

Briefly, the history of the campaign on the Western Front,

up to this date is one of an effort on the part of the French and ourselves to prevent the Germans turning our left flank. In this the Allies were successful. The German offensive was definitely broken, and a defensive line of trenches was established from Switzerland to the English Channel. The Germans then transferred their attacks to the Eastern Front, and devoted their energies to strengthening their positions on the West.

Thus a military situation was created of which military history provided no precedent.

As a matter of fact, our military policy, a Navy strong enough to command the seas, a small but highly efficient expeditionary force, ready to be thrown rapidly on the left flank of the French armies, 250,000 Territorials for home defence, were the only assets in our hands at the outbreak of the war, to meet the liabilities which our foreign policy had incurred. Within three months the distance by which this policy had outstripped our military preparations was apparent. Territorial regiments had to be sent to reinforce the regular army, and new armies, on a scale never dreamt of had to be raised and equipped. And yet, if only we had had, during these first three months, an additional army of 250,000 men, they could have been landed on the Belgian coast with something approaching to decisive results.

But at the end of 1914, the general public, subjected to a strict censorship, which often concealed the facts, and made any real criticism impossible, did not realise the gravity of the position with which we were faced. For the dramatic failure of the German offensive, in the West, hopes of the "Russian Steamroller," a false estimate of the effect of the naval blockade, and faith in the result of a coming offensive in the spring, which was not founded on any accurate estimate of the force required to pass from defence to attack, produced a general feeling of optimism and the expectation of an early and victorious end to the war. And although Lord Kitchener had hinted that the war might last three years, no one could foresee that casualties would run into millions, that thrones would disappear, that the civilisation of Europe would rock, and that Canning's famous saying of a "new world called in to redress the balance of the old" would be realised, before the barrier on the Western Front was finally shattered.

CHAPTER VIII

WEST OR EAST?

Oh, East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet.

RUDYARD KIPLING

I

IT is impossible to exaggerate the anxieties and perplexities by which our War Council was surrounded at the beginning of 1915.

In the West, the German advance had, it is true, been definitely arrested. But, as we have seen, Lord French, as early as September, had begun "dimly to apprehend what the future might have in store for us," and to think that "given forces equally matched, you can 'bend' but you cannot 'break' your enemy's trench line." New armies were being raised, but there was no possibility of their being ready until the spring. And the war of trenches which had set in required big guns and explosives in quantities which could not be got ready for many months.

In the East the Russians had begun a second invasion of East Prussia, and had driven the Germans from their prepared positions within their frontiers. In Poland, Hindenburg and Ludendorff's second offensive on Poland had been brought to a standstill before Warsaw. In Galicia the Austrians had been heavily defeated, and the Russians were pressing forward to the passes of the Carpathians.

But while hopes were still held of a further advance by the Russians, our Cabinet was only too well aware that there was a serious shortage in the Russian armies of rifles, ammunition, and artillery of every kind. And, unfortunately, the entry of Turkey into the war at the end of October, had closed the Dardanelles, the only line of communication, except the ice-bound ports of Archangel and Vladivostock and other negligible routes, through which Russia might be supplied, her deficiencies made good, and her great potential strength made available.

The favourable military position in the Balkans was more apparent than real. For, although in December 1914, the Serbians had by a superhuman effort defeated and driven out of their country no less than five Austrian Army Corps, during the first months of 1915 it was confidently expected that this success would be promptly avenged by another offensive, in which German, and even Bulgarian forces might co-operate.

The key of the diplomatic and military problems with which we were faced in the Balkans lay at Sofia. And Bulgaria was brooding over wrongs done to her at the close of the second Balkan War which were not wholly imaginary.

During the first Balkan War in 1913, the brunt of the fighting had been borne, and the heaviest losses incurred, by Bulgaria, who, in accordance with the plans of the Balkan League against Turkey, had defeated the Turks, while Greece and Serbia had overrun Thrace and Macedonia. The future division of these territories had been settled by a treaty made before the war. But inasmuch as Austria had refused to allow Serbia to retain her window on the Adriatic, Serbia had claimed the right to revise this treaty, repudiated some of its terms, and both Serbia and Greece had continued to occupy the territories they had conquered. Bulgaria promptly replied to this repudiation by violence, and had turned on her former Allies. A fratricidal strife followed, distinguished by cruelties and atrocities on either side, in the midst of which the sudden intervention of Roumania resulted in the complete and utter defeat of Bulgaria. It was a case of *væ victis*. By the Treaty of Bukarest, to which we were parties, Bulgaria was deprived of all the share which her treaty had given her in Macedonia and Thrace, which was divided between Greece and Serbia, her native province of the Dobroudja was given to Roumania, and Adrianople, which had been retaken by the Turks, was retained by them, despite the protests of the Great Powers.

In 1915, therefore, Greece and Serbia on the one side, and Bulgaria on the other, looked at each other across the river of blood created by the second Balkan War.

But Serbia was now involved in a war with the Central Empires, and Bulgaria had a move either way. Would Bulgaria see in Serbia's need her own opportunity for revenge? Would she strike at once? Or would she remain neutral for a while, and then fall on a further weakened and war-worn Serbia? Could Serbia and Greece be induced to make concessions to Bulgaria

in Thrace and Macedonia? Could Bulgaria be persuaded, then, to forgive and forget the past, come into a new Balkan Confederation, the constituent parts of which would assure their freedom by helping to overthrow the Central Empires and assist in the destruction of Turkey, their ancient enemy? But then Venizelos was our friend, Serbia our Ally, and both were sceptical and suspicious of the good intentions and the good faith of Bulgaria. And the Balkan States, without exception, were realists, valuing military help more than specious promises, and their very existence depended on their correct appreciation of whether the Allies or the Central Empires were likely to win the War.

The story of military and diplomatic events in 1915 is largely the story of the military successes of the Central Empires in the East, and the consequent failure of the Allies to secure either the co-operation or the neutrality of Bulgaria.

II

From the pages of the reports of the Dardanelles Commission we are enabled to gather something of the different plans and policies which, under the circumstances we have outlined, were discussed by our War Council.

Quot homines, tot sententiæ. And it was our misfortune that during this period we were carrying on a war, the area of which was constantly extending, without the advice and assistance of a strong General Staff. For at the outbreak of the war the best-known of our military officers had all gone to France with the Expeditionary Force, and our General Staff at home was only reconstituted in the autumn of 1915, first under Sir Archibald Murray, and then under Sir William Robertson. Until this was done, though the Continental experience of two generations had proved the necessity of placing in different hands the organisation and supply of armies, and their strategic direction, the impossible task of combining both these functions was placed under the single control of Lord Kitchener.

It was under these circumstances that the famous controversy between "Westerners" and "Easterners" began, a controversy which it is possible was not finally decided, even when at last, in 1918, the German armies were defeated on the West.

Had a complete deadlock been reached on the Western Front? Was it probable that even when the numbers of the Allies had

grown and artillery and munitions had multiplied, the barrier on the West could be broken down? Or was it possible that on an Eastern Front lay an easier and a shorter road to victory? Or was it prudent to hold that the theory of a complete deadlock on the Western Front had not yet been proved or disproved, that our main military forces should still be concentrated on the West in another offensive, the results of which would show the necessity of seeking other theatres of war? These were the questions which the War Council were called upon to answer when they decided our military policy for 1915. And the story of our military plans for that year is the story of a struggle between the Eastern and Western schools of thought, of a compromise, rather than a decision, taken on their rival merits, with the result that our policy lay hopelessly straddled between two alternatives.

Lord Fisher was building a great Armada designed to force the Baltic, effect a landing of Russian troops in Pomerania, within ninety miles of Berlin, and strike a blow at the very heart of Germany.

Lord French, as we can read in his "1914," was not convinced that "the impossibility of breaking through the German line in Flanders had been proved," and thought that "this operation was feasible provided a sufficiency of high explosive shells and of guns was provided." In addition to which, he thought that "even if it were proved impossible to break through the German lines, so large a margin of safety was needed that troops could not be withdrawn from his theatre," and that there were "no theatres other than those which were then in progress in which decisive results could be obtained."

In Lord French's book we can also find the appreciation by General Joffre and the French General Staff, which is short and precise:

(1) I wish to call your attention to the following points:

(2) The French General Staff consider a German offensive possible—even probable—in the near future.

(3) Our front must, therefore, be made absolutely secure. If broken, for example, about Roye and Montdidier, the consequences for the Allies would be of the most serious description.

(4) In addition to (3) we must place ourselves in the position of being able to resume the offensive.

(5) Because of (3) and (4) reserves are absolutely necessary.

(6) For these reasons I am anxious for a rapid release of the Corps, north of the British line.

LORD FRENCH

(7) We must never lose sight of the decisive result, and all secondary operations must give way.

(8) Operations towards Ostend-Zeebrugge, though important, are for the moment secondary, and, in my opinion, should follow, rather than precede, the principal action, viz. the collection of reserves.

To resume :

(*a*) To beat the enemy, it is necessary to have reserves.

(*b*) These reserves can only come from the North as British reinforcements set them free.

(*c*) The German menace, not a vain thing, makes it necessary to collect these reserves in the shortest possible time.

(*d*) The main object, viz. the defeat of the enemy, makes it necessary to delay the offensive towards Ostend-Zeebrugge.

Another memorandum, on January 1, 1915, called attention to " the remarkable deadlock which had occurred on the Western Front," suggested that " Germany could perhaps be struck most effectively and with the most lasting results on the Peace of the world through her Allies, and particularly through Turkey," and asked and answered with a negative the question, " whether it was impossible, then, to weave a web round Turkey which should end her career as a European Power ? " These were the views of Sir Maurice Hankey, Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, and one of the unknown powers behind the Throne.

But we are mainly concerned with Mr. Lloyd George and the important part which, from now on, he began to play in our high policy and conduct of the war. And it may seem curious to assert, as we suggest is the case, that the place which history will award him is dependent on the judgment, which will one day be passed on a conception of policy, strategic and military, from which he never departed, but which was never permitted to prevail.

During the latter months of 1914 his interest and attention, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, had been mainly devoted to the financial problems and arrangements occasioned by the war. These duties took him on various occasions to Paris. And it is, we think, reasonable to infer that in the course of these visits he was given opportunities of hearing many opinions on the military position, which Lord Kitchener's well-known reticence on military matters made impossible at home.

However, as the result of these visits, Mr. Lloyd George undoubtedly formed the opinion, from which he never swerved, that a position of " eternal stalemate " had been reached on the

Western Front, a position which, in his judgment, would not be altered by the sending of an additional half-million men.

In a written memorandum, therefore, on January 1, 1915, he submitted an elaborate alternative policy for the consideration of the War Council. In this document he advocated, as the basis of our military policy for 1915, an acceptance of the position of a "stalemate" on the Western Front, and preparations for an attack on Austria in conjunction with the Serbians. He calculated that in the spring of 1915 our new armies would amount to 700,000, making, with the 300,000 then in France, a total force of 1,000,000 men. Of this force he suggested that a reserve of 400,000 should be left to meet contingencies in France, and that the remaining 600,000 should be either landed at Salonika, or on the Dalmatian coast. He calculated, further, that when this expedition had materialised, it would necessarily be assisted by the intervention of Roumanian forces amounting, at least, to 300,000, and Greek and Montenegrin armies of 200,000.

Thus an army of over a million men would ultimately be launched in a great offensive against Austria, on her most vulnerable frontier, which would compel her to detach a considerable army from the defence of Cracow and leave Silesia undefended against a Russian advance. He also confidently anticipated that action in this direction, along the coast of Dalmatia, which, it was well known, Italy wished to annex, would almost certainly secure Italian intervention on our side.

In addition to this major expedition, Mr. Lloyd George also suggested a minor operation against Turkey. At this date it was supposed that the Turks were gathering a great army for the invasion of Egypt, and that some 80,000 men were being collected in Syria and moved towards the Egyptian frontier. And Mr. Lloyd George's plan was to allow the Turks to embark on this venture, and, while they were attacking our troops on the Suez Canal, to land a force of 100,000 men in Syria, which would cut them off, and cause Syria to fall into our hands.

We should add that the diplomatic position favourable to the major operation was to be secured by a strong military mission, which it was suggested should be sent to the Balkans.

We do not presume to pass any judgment on the merits of this policy. Unfortunately, as we have seen, we had no General Staff strong enough to examine these and other plans in the light of military possibility and in terms of munitions and men. And, as Mr. Harold Spender, in his "Life" of Mr. Lloyd George, so

justly remarks, "It is impossible to say what would have been the result if it had been adopted, since the fate of battles, after all, lies always on the lap of the gods. No mortal can be assured of success; he can only deserve it." But it is interesting to note that, in August 1919, M. Briand disclosed to a French provincial newspaper, that:

> In January 1915, when he was Minister of Justice in M. Viviani's Cabinet, he proposed to organise an expedition of 300,000 men, in collaboration with the English, which expedition, landing in one of the Adriatic ports, would have joined the Serbians and would have helped them to win important victories against the Austrians. The idea was adopted in principle. Nevertheless, M. Millerand, Secretary for War, and M. Delcassé, Foreign Secretary, raised objections and demanded to have the plan submitted to Headquarters, where it was rejected.

It is, of course, unnecessary to add that Mr. Lloyd George's plan, like that of M. Briand's, to which it bears so remarkable a similarity, was never adopted. But when, later in the year, General Joffre's Champagne offensive yielded little apparent result, the Dardanelles Expedition ended in failure, and Serbia was overwhelmed by a combined Austro-German and Bulgarian attack, the facts with regard to the plan which Mr. Lloyd George had advocated became known in certain parliamentary and journalistic circles. And this knowledge, together with the important part played by Mr. Lloyd George in the organising of munitions, which we shall relate in another chapter, added to a reputation which was steadily growing, and a feeling began to arise in many influential circles, that in Mr. Lloyd George was to be found the person best fitted for the supreme conduct of the war.

If we may quote again the words of Mr. Harold Spender, which gained emphasis as successive attacks on the Western Front broke down, "When men looked back on those years of bloody battles, they could not help asking themselves again, 'Had there not, perhaps, been an easier way?'"

III

It is probable that of the various plans put before the War Council in January of 1915, Lord Kitchener was inclined, and intended, to adopt the intermediate one of awaiting events before coming to a final decision. But by the middle of January, Fate

had in fact decided that the Gallipoli Peninsula should be our new theatre of war, and the War Council drifted almost unconsciously into the ill-fated Dardanelles Expedition.

In the early days of the war Mr. Churchill, when measures for the defence of Egypt had been discussed, had suggested that "the ideal method of defending Egypt was by an attack on the Gallipoli Peninsula, since this, if successful, would give us control of the Dardanelles, and we could dictate terms at Constantinople." But the attack then suggested was a combined military and naval attack, sufficient forces for which were not available. And it would seem that the reconsideration of this idea at the beginning of January 1915 was largely a matter of chance.

On January 2 a telegram had been received from the Grand Duke Nicholas requesting Lord Kitchener to make a naval or military demonstration against the Turks in order to relieve the Russians, who were being hard pressed in the Caucasus. An immediate military demonstration was impossible, as no troops were available, but from this request sprang the plan of bombarding and taking the Gallipoli Peninsula by ships alone, commended on the ground that the attempt might be abandoned at any time, but which, in fact, ended in the Dardanelles Expedition. And, while it is unfair to say that Mr. Churchill must bear the responsibility for this unfortunate expedition, it is probable that if there had been no Mr. Churchill, there would have been no attempt to force the Straits with ships alone, and that if there had been no such attempt, there would have been no military expedition.

The decision to force the Straits with a Navy left the question of future military policy undecided for the moment. Leaving the Western theatre out of account, there only existed the alternatives of military operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula, or in the Balkans, based on Salonika.

Towards the end of January, anxiety as to the possibility of a new offensive against Serbia led to efforts being made to induce Greece to make common cause with Serbia, by offering her the support of a British, a French, and a Russian division. M. Venizelos, however, declined to intervene unless he could be assured of Bulgarian co-operation or friendly neutrality, and, if only the latter could be assured, he insisted on the collaboration of Roumania. Unfortunately, at this moment Austro-German forces were being massed on the Roumanian frontier, the Russian right wing and the Russian armies in the Bukowina were retiring, and

the intervention of Roumania was clearly impossible. In addition to which, three divisions were quite inadequate to make good this deficiency, or allow a margin for possible fluctuations in the attitude of Bulgaria.

Then, as the hope of securing Greek co-operation was vanishing, and as the fear of a German offensive in the West was diminishing, arrangements were made to concentrate the 29th Division, the Naval Division, a French Division, and two Australasian Divisions (which were training in Egypt) in the Mediterranean, ready to take advantage of any turn of the kaleidoscope in the Balkans or to support the naval attack on Gallipoli. Thus we drifted into the Dardanelles military expedition, and our diplomatic policy was deflected in other directions.

IV

The bombardment of the outer forts of the Dardanelles began on February 19, and they were finally silenced on February 25. This, and the prospect of greater successes, produced a profound effect in the Balkans, and led to results and consequences of first importance. There is no reason to doubt that they changed the attitude of Bulgaria, and that she was thereby induced to mark time and watch events. They also produced a movement from another direction. For on March 5 came the first overtures from Italy for her intervention on the side of the Allies. M. Delcassé and M. Sosanoff, thereupon, placed their diplomatic interests in the sole hands of Mr. Asquith, and with the happiest results. For ultimately, Mr. Asquith was able to achieve one of the great diplomatic coups of the war, and on April 26 the secret treaty was signed which gave Italy the Trentino, and German-speaking Southern Tyrol, Trieste, and the greater part of the Dalmatian coast, with the neighbouring islands, the Albanian port of Valona, with a considerable hinterland, the Dodekanese Islands and the territory of Adalia in South-Western Asia Minor, as the price of her intervention.

But the prospect of a successful forcing of the Straits caused our policy also to move in another direction. It was well known that one of the principal reasons which induced Russia to face the hazards of a European War was the hope of fulfilling her ambitions with regard to Constantinople, and securing a warm water outlet to the sea : a hope which we had frustrated at the price of the Crimean War. In March of 1915 things were going badly with Russia, and there was a real danger that Ger-

many might strain every effort to make a separate Peace, and even come to an arrangement with her with regard to the Straits. In these compelling circumstances, on March 10 the War Council, fortified by the presence of Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law, agreed that in the event of a victorious war, Russia's ambitions should be satisfied, both with regard to Constantinople and the control of the Dardanelles.

Both these new factors, the negotiations with Italy for her intervention, the agreement with Russia with regard to Constantinople, governed our policy in March and April, and when the naval attack failed on March 19, forced us almost automatically into the military operations.

On April 25 the great military feat of landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula was achieved by Sir Ian Hamilton and his army. But by May 9 the advance beyond the cliffs was definitely held up, and a war of trenches, requiring large reinforcements, and quantities of high explosives, had begun.

CHAPTER IX

SHELLS

"As Commander-in-Chief of the Army in France, my relation with the late Secretary of State for War was constant, and I am anxious to place on record that no effort was ever spared by him to supply all our demands. I knew well the difficulties which lay in his way, not only in providing the necessary men and material for the Expeditionary Force in a war which was not of our seeking, and which has increased to quite unexpected magnitude, but also in the immediate and colossal expansion which the military forces of the Empire have necessarily undergone.

"Lord Kitchener faced those difficulties with characteristic determination, and the evidence of the debt which the nation owes to him is to be found in the magnificent armies which are now defending our interests all over the world.

"It would be idle to pretend that, in the past two years, I have always seen eye to eye with the great Field-Marshal who has been taken from us, but such divergence of opinion as occurred in no way interfered with the national interests, nor did it ever shake my confidence in Lord Kitchener's will-power and ability to provide us with everything that we required."—*Viscount French: speech in the House of Lords on June 20, 1916; on the occasion of the tributes paid to the services rendered to the nation by Lord Kitchener.*

I

CONTEMPORANEOUSLY with the events related in the last chapter, our War Council was much exercised with the problem of raising and equipping our new armies, and of supplying the guns and munitions necessitated by the new trench warfare which had then set in, and which no one had foreseen. But the general public was quite unaware of the serious nature of these difficulties, until in April and May a public agitation and a political movement arose which, combined with other events, led to the fall of the Liberal Cabinet and the formation of the First Coalition Cabinet towards the end of May.

We must note, in the first place, that a shortage of ammunition had very soon been felt, in a greater and a lesser degree, by all the opposing armies. According to Admiral Tirpitz's memoirs even the German Army, in spite of careful forethought and methodical preparation, had been taken by surprise by their large expenditure of ammunition, and the armies of the Crown Prince had, in consequence, been compelled to abandon their attack on Verdun in 1914. And General Ludendorff, in describ-

ing " the great depression " which existed in the German Army on the Western Front in September of 1914, adds that " this had been deepened by the lack of ammunition." For a similar reason the French offensive in 1915 had to be postponed until September, although M. Albert Thomas had begun his great work of organising the French factories and workshops as early as October in 1914. But, while exact data are not available, it is probably safe to say that effective measures for increasing the output, on a large scale, were undertaken, both in France and Germany, some months before the necessary steps were taken here ; although it must be remembered that the large permanent establishment of their armies, their larger arsenals, and the great advantage given by their system of compulsory service, made their task very much easier than our own.

At the beginning of the war the provision of guns and ammunition for our Expeditionary Force was in accordance with the scale laid down by the war establishment and by the Mowatt Committee, and was, of course, based on the experience of previous wars. And it is important to note, in view of the controversy which afterwards arose, that our 18-pounder field-guns had been provided with shrapnel, to the entire exclusion of high-explosive shells. The rival merits of these two kinds of shell had been considered by our General Staff in 1907, who then decided in favour of shrapnel, but made provision for supplementing shrapnel fire by adding to each division a proportion of howitzers, provided with common and high-explosive shell. But unfortunately our military advisers had not realised, as the Germans had, the important part which was likely to be played by field and heavy howitzers. For 6-inch howitzers were tried, tentatively, for the first time, in our manœuvres in 1912, and a trial of a 9·2-inch howitzer had only been completed just one month before the outbreak of the war.

When the new armies were being raised, orders were of course given for guns and ammunition. As the campaign proceeded, experience showed that the number of rounds per gun now required exceeded the amount which had previously been thought to be sufficient, and the value of guns and howitzers, and of high-explosive shells for field-guns, soon became apparent. Although it would seem that some time elapsed before our General Staff in France had quite made up their minds as to the value of high-explosive shells for field-guns, and that opinion was divided as to the relative proportions of shrapnel and high explosives which

they required. These new developments called for guns, howitzers, and ammunition of a type not in existence, for which provision had to be made at once. Unfortunately, we had little or no experience in the making of high-explosive shell, with its propellent, its fuze, its bursting charge, its cartridge-case and its primer, and, while we had a direct impact fuze, this was of no use for field-guns, and consequently a fuze which would detonate a small lyddite shell had to be hastily improvised and experimented with.

However, early in September General von Donop and his experts had succeeded in designing a satisfactory fuze, and in October General Deville, the head of the French Ordnance Department, came over for purposes of consultation, and gave our War Office the benefit of his larger experience. On October 19 the first 1,000 rounds of 18-pounder high-explosive shells were sent to France for trial and report. By the middle of November they had been favourably reported on, and a request given for the supply of shrapnel and high explosives in the proportion of 50 per cent. of each. Yet, apparently, opinion was still so divided that, a week later, another request was made, changing the proportion of high explosives from 50 to 25 per cent., although later on the views of those who believed in the larger proportion of high explosives prevailed.

Now the change from shrapnel to high-explosive shells raised a very difficult question both of manufacture and of production. Our machinery was limited. And if the machinery then employed in producing shrapnel had been turned over to the production of high explosives, the necessary transformation would have taken ten weeks or more, during which peri od neither shrapnel nor high explosive would have been manufactured.

Up to November 1, 1914, our expenditure of 18-pounder shells had amounted to 385,000 rounds, while our output at that date was only 45,000 rounds per month. It was, therefore, thought to be impossible, at this stage, to adopt a policy which would produce no shells of any kind for some weeks, even if, eventually, the more valuable high-explosive shells would be supplied.

Under these circumstances the existing orders and manufacture of shrapnel were continued, and additional orders were given for larger quantities of high-explosive shells, which were placed with the armament firms, with firms who had had no experience of this class of manufacture, and also with firms in Canada and America. But the dislocation occasioned by the war, the shortage

of skilled labour caused by the haphazard recruitment of the new armies, delays in obtaining the necessary machinery, and in erecting new buildings, the limitation of output due to the restrictive trade union practices and conditions, all contributed to a lamentable shortage in deliveries. And, whereas these contracts had provided for the delivery of 481,000 high-explosive 18-pounder shells, and 220,000 rounds of 4·5-in. howitzer shells, by May 15 only 52,000 and 73,000 of each kind of shell were, in fact, delivered on this date.

The world-wide extent of the temporary dislocation caused by the war is shown by the fact that the great Bethlehem Steel Works in America, which had undertaken to deliver 80,000 rounds of 18-pounder shells, as part of their contract, during March, were only able to deliver 3,000 in May, although ultimately, as conditions improved, the whole of their contract was completed by subsequent deliveries before the given date.

Experience had shown that even given machinery labour, and no limitation of output, a firm fully equipped for armament work could not produce any large output of a new type of ammunition under from four to five months.

Yet, in spite of all these difficulties, it is just possible that a crisis might have been avoided but for the fact that in March we had drifted into the Dardanelles expedition. Thus, while the curve of output was beginning steadily and continuously to rise, munitions had to be diverted to the Mediterranean, and *two* forces had to be supplied from a store of munitions which was insufficient for *one*.

II

The difficulty experienced in getting the new supplies soon became apparent to the Cabinet. In October 1914 a Committee, consisting of Lord Kitchener, Lord Haldane, Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Churchill, Mr. McKenna, Mr. Runciman, and Lord Lucas was formed, to advise the War Office as to the best means of providing the guns and ammunition which were required.

It may be doubted whether a Committee of this kind, endowed with advisory powers only, was the best solution of a problem which required new executive organisation, and new executive authority, such as was given in June to the Ministry of Munitions. Nevertheless, this Committee dealt with the supply of guns, rifles, and cordite, and one of their most successful acts was the

appointment of Lord Moulton at the head of a body of experts, to supervise the manufacture of cordite, with such good results that Mr. Lloyd George was able to tell the House of Commons on April 21, 1915, that the production of high explosives had, by then, been placed "on a footing which relieved us of all anxiety, and which enabled us, in addition to that, largely to supply our Allies."

Curiously enough, the attention of this Committee was mainly directed to the supply of guns and not to the supply of high-explosive shells.

The War Office had estimated that some 850 18-pounder field-guns was the probable delivery which could be expected by July 1. With this estimate the Committee were dissatisfied, and they laid down a policy of sub-contracting, under the skilled supervision of the large armament firms, which it was hoped would lead to a larger and more rapid production. In pursuance of this policy, representatives of the Government arsenals, and of the private firms, were called before them and pressed to increase their estimates, on the assumption that a *carte blanche* would be given them to spend what money they considered necessary in laying down new plant, in sub-contracting, in fact, in taking any steps which would increase the output and expedite deliveries. Hopes were then held out that the number of 18-pounder field-guns, and 4·5-in, howitzers, might be increased to something over 2,000 and 500 respectively; but the estimate of the War Office proved to be only too well founded, and by July 1 only 800 and 165 of each class of guns were, in fact, delivered.

Similarly with machine-guns; some 3,000 machine-guns were promised by July 10, but when this date arrived some 1,600 only were delivered.

The War Office followed a similar policy of sub-contracting with regard to shells; with the result, as we have seen, that, instead of 481,000 high-explosive 18-pounder shells, and 220,000 rounds of 4·5-in. howitzer shells, 52,000 and 73,000 of each kind, only, were in fact delivered on May 15. And although Mr. Lloyd George told the House of Commons on April 21, 1915, that "great things had been done, he thought wonderful things," and although he was able to give the House of Commons the startling figures that, taking the figure 20 as representing our output of shell in September, this had increased in February to 256, and in March to 388, and that a corresponding increase would take place in April, the index figure, on which these calculations were based,

related only to 18-pounder shells, which were mainly, if not entirely, shrapnel, and the index figure itself was the same in August as it was in September, and was, necessarily, so low as to make the great and striking relative increase more apparent than real.

But of the many factors which contributed to the unfortunate actual result, the most important was the difficulty with regard to labour.

On May 22, 1919, a provincial paper, "The Yorkshire Observer," published a remarkable document, written by Lord Kitchener in January 1915. In this memorandum Lord Kitchener wrote:

> The real crux of the situation is, in my opinion, the organisation of the skilled labour required to work the machinery, and if the Chancellor of the Exchequer could help us in this, and in the many labour difficulties with which we are confronted, I have little doubt that in time an increased number of men, up to a total of 3,000,000, may be recruited and trained, fit to take the field. In the efforts we are now making to raise, arm, and equip 2,000,000 men, we are faced with the grave difficulties, not the least of which is that, constantly, our manufacturers are themselves unable, owing to shortage of skilled labour, to keep their promises of delivery of arms, ammunition, etc. This shortage could be very much lessened by the employment of unskilled, together with skilled, labour on the same machines; but trade union rules do not admit of this. One of the first essentials, therefore, is to secure the requisite modifications of these rules.
>
> A Committee is sitting, on which Sir George Gibb represents the War Office, for the purpose of organising labour. I understand that they have been more or less successful in some of their efforts to induce trade unions to agree to modify the restrictive regulations which they now impose on labour; but if the Chancellor of the Exchequer could use his great powers to persuade the trade unions to deal with this matter at once he would be doing a great deal to help us in preparing an army of the dimensions he regards as necessary. I quite agree with him that the closing of public-houses in areas occupied by our labouring classes would have a very great effect, but such a measure would no doubt have to be carried out with care, as the men might resent any interference with their present habits. I would suggest, in this connection, that by keeping the public-houses closed up to 11 a m. it would be possible to get the men into the works before they had an opportunity of obtaining intoxicants. . . .
>
> But the great difficulty, which I foresee, is that to which I have referred, viz., labour.

By December of 1914 this difficulty had become acute, and it was obvious that the various contractors would be unable to

fulfil their contracts. The Board of Trade then tried to arrange the transfer of mechanics to the armament firms. Their efforts met at first with promising results, for in January and February, 1915, some 4,500 and 2,000 men were so transferred, although in March the number had fallen to 640. The problem was pressing to a crisis. On March 9 a new Defence of the Realm Bill was suddenly presented to Parliament giving the Government the right to take over any factories and workshops at their will. On March 20 Mr. George Booth went to the War Office to put these powers into operation and to work out a scheme for obtaining the labour necessary for working the machinery which had already been installed. But Mr. Booth's plans, which included a scheme for dividing the country into districts, and diverting labour to them, were hardly matured before another Committee, known as "The Treasury Committee," was formed on April 8, under the chairmanship of Mr. Lloyd George, which soon swallowed up Mr. Booth, and this Committee undertook the work of prospecting for a new output of munitions, and of dealing with the supply of labour, until on June 5 the Ministry of Munitions was formed, followed, shortly afterwards, by the passing of the Munitions Act, which dealt with both problems, in statutory form, on drastic and comprehensive lines.

III

The first public hint that all was not well with regard to the supply of munitions was given by Mr. Lloyd George in a speech at Bangor on February 28, 1915.

> "We are conducting a war," he told his audience, "as if there were no war. . . . This war is not going to be fought mainly on the battle-fields of Belgium and Poland; it is going to be fought in the workshops of France and Great Britain. . . . We stand more in need of equipment than we do of men. This is an engineers' war, and it will be won or lost owing to the shortcomings of engineers. Unless we are able to equip our armies, our predominance in men will avail us nothing."

And, in the course of his speech, he spoke of the effect of "drink" on output, in words which gave rise to subsequent controversy, and which deflected public opinion, for a time, to one aspect only of the problem by which we were faced.

"Most of our workmen," he said, "are putting every ounce of strength into this urgent work for their country, loyally and patriotically. But that is not true of all. There are some, I am sorry to say, who shirk their duty in this great emergency. I hear of workmen in armament firms who refuse to do a full week's work for the nation's need. What is the reason? They are a minority. The vast majority belong to a class we can depend upon. The others are a minority. But, you must remember, a small minority of workmen can throw a whole works out of gear. What is the reason? Sometimes it is one thing, sometimes it is another, but let us be perfectly candid. It is mostly the lure of drink. They refuse to work full time, and when they return their strength and efficiency are impaired by the way in which they have spent their leisure. Drink is doing us more harm than all the German submarines put together."

Further disclosures soon followed:

On March 15 Lord Kitchener spoke on the same subject, in grave words, in the House of Lords:

"The armament firms," he said, "have promptly responded to our appeal and have undertaken orders of vast magnitude. The great majority also of the employees have loyally risen to the occasion, and have worked, and are working, overtime and nightshifts, in all the various workshops and factories in the country. Notwithstanding these efforts to meet our requirements we have, unfortunately, found that the output is not only not equal to our necessities, but does not fulfil our expectations, for a very large number of our orders have not been completed by the dates on which they were promised.

"The progress in equipping our new armies and also in supplying the necessary war material for our forces in the field has been seriously hampered by the failure to obtain sufficient labour, and by delays in the production of the necessary plant, largely due to the enormous demands, not only of ourselves but of our Allies

"I have heard rumours that the workmen in some factories have an idea that the war is going so well that there is no necessity for them to work their hardest. I can only say that the supply of war material, at the present moment, is causing me very serious anxiety, and I wish all those engaged in the manufacture and the supply of stores to realise that it is absolutely essential not only that the arrears in the deliveries of our munitions should be wiped off, but that the output of every round of ammunition is of the utmost importance, and has a large influence on our operations in the field.

"It will, I am sure, be readily understood that when new plant is available for the production of war material, those firms that are not now so engaged should release from their own work the labour necessary to keep the machinery fully occupied on the production for which it is being

laid down, as well as to supply sufficient labour to keep working, at full power, the whole of the machinery which we now have."

Two days later Mr. Lloyd George urged a special conference of representative trade union leaders to accept proposals, which were later put into statutory form by the Munitions Act, to submit all disputes to arbitration, to suspend those practices and customs which led to a restriction of output, and to permit women to be employed in the shops, in exchange for a curtailment of the profits earned by employers. And he again returned to the subject of "drink" by telling them that "drink was doing us more damage in the war than all the German submarines put together. We were fighting Germany, Austria, and drink, and, as far as he could see, the greatest of these three deadly foes was "drink." And on March 27 Lord French, in a special interview to "The Times," told the public, "the protraction of the war depends entirely upon the supply of men and munitions. Should these be unsatisfactory the war will, accordingly, be prolonged. I dwell emphatically on the need for munitions."

From thence on the agitation grew, fed by alarming whispers, and even public statements, which originated in France, that the operations of our armies were being seriously hindered by a shortage of munitions. But for a short while this shortage was mainly attributed, owing to Mr. Lloyd George's striking words, to "the lure of drink," and these words were quoted to the exclusion of the other suggestions he had made. Public expression was given, in a very marked way, to this feeling when, on March 30, the Sovereign himself declared his intention, and that of his household, to abstain entirely from alcoholic liquors, an example which was followed by a few other well-known men, but which did not meet with any very encouraging or widespread response from any class.

Now the evil effects of alcohol on physical well-being, and on industrial output, are well known and undeniable. But one result of Mr. Lloyd George's statements, which were subsequently justified by him from official reports, which he read to the House of Commons, was, that a feeling of resentment arose among large masses of the working classes against what was interpreted as a general charge, that their social habits were the principal, if not the sole, reason for the shortage in output.

Under these circumstances, conscious of a feeling of something like exasperation among the skilled workers, conscious also,

as he subsequently revealed in a speech on June 3, 1919, that "questions of the greatest possible moment were then impending, and that it was of the utmost importance not to expose our own weakness or to give encouragement to the Germans, to let them think that we could not, and were not, able to do more than hold our own," and fortified, as he disclosed on the same occasion, by a personal letter from Lord Kitchener, in which Lord Kitchener had written, "I have had a talk with French. He told me I could let you know that with the present supply of ammunition he will have as much as his troops will be able to use on the next forward movement," Mr. Asquith made his famous speech at Newcastle on April 20. This speech was addressed to the workmen engaged in the Tyneside workshops and ship-yards, and was intended to give the authority of the head of the Government to the urgent need for increased output of every kind; but, in the turn of events, it was destined to have far-reaching political consequences to its author.

In the course of his remarks Mr. Asquith, while he emphasised the fact that we were engaged in a "war, not only of men, but of material," and dwelt on the necessity of a temporary suspension of restrictive rules and customs, denied, categorically, that our armies had, in fact, suffered from a shortage of munitions.

"Let one thing," he said, "be clearly understood. I am not here either to acknowledge or to impute remissness. I do not believe that any Army or Navy has ever, either entered upon a campaign, or been maintained during a campaign, with better or more adequate equipment.

"I saw a statement the other day that the operations, not only of our Army, but of our Allies, were being crippled, or at any rate, hampered, by our failure to provide the necessary ammunition. There is not a word of truth in that statement. I say there is not a word of truth in that statement, which is the more mischievous, because it is calculated to dishearten our troops, to discourage our Allies, and to stimulate the hopes and activities of our enemies.

"Nor is there any more truth in the suggestion that the Government of which I am the head have only recently become alive to the importance and urgency of these matters On the contrary, in the earliest days of the war, when some of our would-be instructors were thinking of quite other things, they were already receiving our anxious attention, and as far back as, I think, the month of September, I appointed a Committee of the Cabinet, presided over by Lord Kitchener, to survey the situation from this point of view—a Committee whose labours and inquiries resulted in a very substantial enlargement both of the field and of machinery of supply."

And, after making the reassuring statement that the " main armament firms register the very high average of 67 to 69 hours per week per man," he called for a still further production.

> There is not a single naval or military authority among us who, in view of our proximate and prospective requirements, does not declare that a large and rapid increase in the output of munitions has become one of the first necessities of the State. Lord Kitchener says so; Lord Fisher, I know, would say so. Sir John French has said so. . . .
>
> This, then . . . is what in the name of your King and your country, we ask you to do, to deliver the goods.

It is curious, in looking back on the controversy which afterwards arose, to find that while Mr. Asquith was defending the policy of his Government on the public platform at Newcastle, a similar defence was urged in greater detail by Mr. Lloyd George in the House of Commons on the following day. For in the course of a debate which was raised on April 21 on a motion by Mr. Hewins, calling for the unified administration of all firms capable of producing munitions, Mr. Lloyd George entered into an elaborate justification of the policy which had been pursued and the steps which had been taken.

After pointing out that the original expeditionary force had been " doubled, quadrupled, and quintupled," all of which had to be " raised, organised, officered, equipped, and provided with munitions in the course of something like eight months," and that " after eight months of war there were more than six times as many men in France . . . fully equipped and supplied with adequate ammunition, and every man who had dropped out had been replaced," he went on to say that he thought it was fair that this should be recognised, " not only to Lord Kitchener, but to those who had laid the foundations of the organisation, the expansion of which had enabled Lord Kitchener, with his singular organising ability, to turn out this prodigious force, this immense force, and to equip it," and to characterise the creation of this force as " a stupendous thing."

From this well-deserved eulogy he passed to the question of ammunition, and quoted a French general, " one of the ablest generals," as having told him that the " surprise of the war had been the amount of ammunition which we had to expend. The ordinary ideas of strategy were that, after three or four weeks of manœuvring, you would have a great battle, and that that battle

might occupy a fortnight or three weeks, and of course there would be a very great expenditure of ammunition; and we thought that after that one or other of the parties would have been defeated. There would have been a retreat, a reconstruction, and the other army would have advanced, and perhaps, after another month's time, we would have another great fight. But for seventy-nine days and nights my men have been fighting, and firing has gone on almost night and day by these great cannons." Mr. Lloyd George went on to say that "it was perfectly clear that the Germans also were taken by surprise." And gave a figure "which he thought would astonish the House, as it had astonished him," namely, that "during the fortnight of fighting in and around Neuve Chapelle almost as much ammunition was spent by our artillery as during the whole two and three-quarter years of the Boer War."

From these generalisations he passed to the details of the steps which had been taken, and which we have already outlined. The employment of "2,500 to 3,000 firms in the production of munitions of war, either in the form of direct contracts or sub-contracts" and the efforts to "fill up the labour deficiencies in the armament firms."

"The amount of ammunition," he added, "which we require depends upon the policy which is adopted at the Front, and when the time comes and the armies must be increased, when the policy must necessarily be more aggressive and more active, then the amount of ammunition required will be enormously increased.

"Therefore, in order to supply, not any deficiency at the moment, but to supply the necessary amount of ammunition for the inevitable war policy of our generals, it will undoubtedly be necessary to adopt some policy such as that which was sketched out in the resolution of the honourable gentleman" (Mr. Hewins).

This highly satisfactory account was completed by giving the figures of the increased output of artillery ammunition.

"Take the figure 20 as representing our output in September. By October it went up to 90. In November it was 90 again, because the new machinery which was laid down did not come into operation until a month later. By December it went up to 156. In January it was 186. In February it was 256, and in March it was 388. . . . This means, even if you take the increased output of September, that by the month of March it has been multiplied, and I have no hesitation in saying that in the month of April the increase will correspond to the increase which has taken place in the preceding month I am perfectly certain," added Mr. Lloyd

George, "that this will gratify the House, because I so cordially agree with the honourable gentleman when he says that success in this war is a question of ammunition."

And by describing the great work done in the increased production of explosives by Lord Moulton and his Committee, thanks to which, "not only were we assisting our Allies in the matter of explosives, but we were assisting them in respect of other munitions of war."

For the moment, though there was some anxious and rather bewildered criticism, this rather too glowing description of what had been done was accepted. In the House of Commons an adroit Minister, with the resources of a great Department behind him, has never very great difficulty in satisfying a body of men who are necessarily ignorant of actual details, and have little or no first-hand information other than that furnished by the Minister's own speech, on which definite and effective criticism can be based. Half an hour's cross-examination by a small Committee, provided with a short preliminary statement from the Head of the Ordnance Department, would have given, as we have seen, a very different picture of the actual state of affairs!

However, for a while, although Colonel Repington wrote in "The Times" on April 27, "Ministers may say what they please, but the offensive of our Army in France has been hampered for want of artillery ammunition, in the sense that continuous operations have not been practicable until now, and there is not a man in the Army who is not aware of this fact," measures to deal with the "lure of drink" seem to have occupied first place in Mr. Lloyd George's mind. For on April 29 he introduced proposals for doubling the duty on spirits, for a graded surtax on the heavier qualities of beer, for quadrupling the duties on wine, in the course of which he made an imposing case, based on official reports, for attributing the short time and reduced output in many establishments to the effect of high wages and consequent heavy drinking. But, after an acrimonious debate, these proposals were withdrawn and a compromise arrived at. And in May another solution was reached by prohibiting the sale of immature spirits altogether, and by introducing legislation which established the Liquor Control Board to control the sale of liquor in public-houses, in munitions, transport, and military areas, which, subsequently, under Lord D'Abernon, did much good and effective work.

Then, while the old-fashioned and cumbersome machinery of Government Departments was being speeded up, and was creaking and groaning under the process, events led suddenly to a political crisis.

IV

In the spring of 1915 General Joffre was beginning to " test " the German line south of Rheims and north of Arras, in a series of operations which culminated in his great offensive in September. In these operations our armies were co-operating.

On March 10 our offensive at Neuve Chapelle had been followed by a renewal of the struggle between La Bassée and the sea, and a German offensive north of the Lys had been again attempted, in order to take Ypres, advance across the plains to the west, and capture Dunkirk, Calais, and Boulogne. While resisting this attack, our forces sought to counter it by an offensive, in conjunction with the French, designed to isolate La Bassée and even to capture Lille. These operations resulted in the second battle of Ypres, which began on April 26 and ended on May 11 ; while on May 9 the battle for the Aubers Ridge, the prelude of the battle of Festubert, having ended with indecisive results, and the French offensive having also failed, a deadlock was established on the Western Front. On the Gallipoli Peninsula, while a landing had been successfully accomplished, the attack on Krithia had failed by May 9, and there was no immediate prospect of any further advance.

In chapter eighteen of his " 1914 " Lord French writes that " from the beginning of the battle of the Aisne, up to the close of the battle of Loos, at the end of 1915, the scanty supply of munitions of war paralysed all our power of initiative, and, at critical times, menaced our defence with irretrievable disaster."

And, although in a speech in the House of Lords on June 20, 1916, Lord French stated, explicitly, that he was anxious " to place on record that no effort was spared by Lord Kitchener to supply all their demands," that " he knew well the difficulties which lay in his way, not only in providing the necessary men and material for the expeditionary force . . . but also in the immediate and colossal expansion which the military forces of the Empire had necessarily undergone," and that " such divergence of opinion as occurred did not ever shake his confidence in Lord

Kitchener's will to provide them with everything that they required," it is impossible to read this chapter without feeling that in it Lord French has conveyed, and has intended to convey, an impression that Lord Kitchener did not appreciate the great need of munitions, and that his apathy was largely responsible for the failure to supply them. It is equally impossible to read, without sympathy, and without realising the feelings which overwhelmed him, his account of how he watched the opening of the battle of Festubert from the " tower of a ruined church," knowing that he " had only sufficient supply for about forty minutes of artillery preparation for this attack." How, as " he watched the Aubers Ridge, he clearly saw the great inequality of the artillery duels, and, as attack after attack failed, he could see that the absence of sufficient artillery support was doubling and trebling our losses in men " ; and how, to crown all, when he returned to his headquarters he found, waiting for him, a telegram from Lord Kitchener " directing that 20 per cent. of his scanty reserve of ammunition was to be shipped to the Dardanelles."

Opinions will, necessarily, vary as to whether Lord French was justified in the steps which he then thought fit to take. In days of stress time-honoured conventions often disappear.

To quote Lord French's own words, he then " determined on taking the most drastic measures to destroy the apathy of a Government which had brought the Empire to the brink of a disaster. He immediately " gave instructions that evidence should be furnished to Colonel Repington, military correspondent of ' The Times,' who happened to be then at Headquarters, that the vital need of high-explosive shells had been a fatal bar to our army's success on that day." He further had copies made of the correspondence which had taken place between himself and the Government, and he sent his secretary, Colonel Fitzgerald, and Captain Guest, M.P., who was one of his A.D.C.'s and who had been a Junior Whip in Mr. Asquith's Government, with instructions to lay their documents before " Mr. Lloyd George, who had already shown him, by his special interest in this subject that he grasped the deadly nature of our necessities," and also before " Mr. Arthur J. Balfour and Mr. Bonar Law, whose sympathetic understanding of his difficulties had led him to expect that they would take the action that the grave exigency demanded."

On May 12 and 14 he adds : " Colonel Fitzgerald and Captain Guest reported that . . . they had laid the facts before Mr.

Lloyd George, Mr. Balfour, and Mr. Bonar Law." On May 14 "The Times" published Colonel Repington's sensational dispatch, in the course of which it was stated that :

> We had not sufficient high explosive to level the parapets to the ground after the French practice, and when our infantry gallantly stormed the trenches, as they did in both attacks, they found a garrison undismayed, many entanglements still intact, and maxims on all sides ready to pour in streams of bullets. We could not maintain ourselves in the trenches won, and our reserves were thrown in, because the conditions for success were not present.
>
> The attacks were well planned and valiantly conducted. The infantry did splendidly, but the conditions were too hard. The want of an unlimited supply of high explosives was a fatal bar to our success.

And in a leading article "The Times" emphasised this disclosure by saying that "British soldiers died in vain, on the Aubers Ridge, on Sunday, because more shells were needed. The Government, who have so seriously failed to organise adequately our national resources, must bear the share of the grave responsibility. Even now they will not face the situation."

Misfortunes to Governments and to individuals seldom come singly. For while the Government was faced with these grave disclosures, and the possibility, if not the certainty, that they would have to meet a vote of censure and a debate based on first-hand information, they were confronted with an equally grave crisis, which arose in connection with the operations at the Dardanelles. The reports of the Dardanelles Commission show that Lord Fisher had always been opposed to the attempt to force the Straits with ships alone, and had reluctantly acquiesced in it, believing that failure would not be disastrous, that in the event of failure the ships would be withdrawn, and that his great scheme for forcing the Baltic would, consequently, not be seriously interfered with. But by the middle of May Sir Ian Hamilton's forces were definitely held up. A decision was then taken to continue these operations, and ships were in consequence diverted to the Mediterranean. In this diversion Lord Fisher saw the death of his own scheme, reproached himself bitterly for having acquiesced in the original operations, and on May 15 resigned his position as First Sea Lord, left the Admiralty, and could not be persuaded to return.

There were also other factors which led to the final result.

For some time there had been a growing political "unrest"

LORD KITCHENER

caused by the fact that one powerful party was excluded from any share in the control of the great events which were taking place; a feeling which was, moreover, justified by the want of success which the Liberal Cabinet had experienced. To this feeling Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill were on the whole sympathetic on grounds of general policy. In addition to which they both felt that some diminution in the excessive centralisation at the War Office, under Lord Kitchener, would lead to the better conduct of the war. But the position of Lord Kitchener and the play of political forces, at this time, was peculiar. While Lord Kitchener was not a party politician, he was by no means a Liberal politician. On the other hand, the bitter feeling of hostility against the Liberal Cabinet which had been created by past events had been suspended, but not dissipated, by the outbreak of the war. Lord Kitchener, therefore, while he could count on the support which his great name and position gave him among the general public, was assured also, at any time and on any question, of the support of a unanimous Conservative Opposition, as against his Liberal colleagues. While we do not suggest that Lord Kitchener had ever taken advantage of these favourable circumstances, they must necessarily have been present in the mind of his colleagues and even in his own. Now for all these reasons, during the first months of the war, Lord Kitchener's resignation, irrespective of any merits or any difference of opinion which had arisen between his colleagues and himself, would have produced a serious political crisis. But Lord Kitchener's failings, his almost oriental love of secrecy, his passion for centralising all things in his own hands, which had led to some confusion at the War Office, were well known to the Conservative leaders. And while they would have been able and willing to cope with these characteristics in the secrecy of the Council-chamber, they would have been unable and unwilling to do so as an act of public opposition.

In addition to these considerations Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill had for some time realised that, as the war was prolonged, the need for conscription, increased taxation, and other drastic measures was likely to arise, all of which could be more easily carried if they were presented by a Coalition Government which, even if it did not enjoy the complete confidence, would avoid the organised opposition, of any of the great parties in the State. But at the same time they both wished that this coalition should be formed by mutual agreement, when

things were going well, rather than by an arrangement made under duress when things were going badly.

V

It is possible that Mr. Asquith's well-known parliamentary dexterity and his long official experience, supported by the prestige of Lord Kitchener's name, would have enabled him to surmount any *one* of the crises by which he was now confronted; but Lord Fisher's resignation, and the threatened exposure of the shortage of munitions, came suddenly, came simultaneously, came unexpectedly, came at a time when a Ministerial crisis in Italy threatened the existence of the secret treaty which had been concluded, and together they seemed irresistible.

On Wednesday, May 12, some little excitement had been caused in the House of Commons, when Mr. Handel Booth asked Mr. Asquith whether " in view of the steps necessary to be taken in order to grapple with the rearrangement of industry and social life consequent upon a prolonged struggle, he would consider the desirability of admitting into the ranks of Ministers leading members of the various political parties." For although Mr. Asquith replied in emphatic terms that while " the Government were greatly indebted to the leading members of all parties for suggestions and assistance on certain specific subjects, the step suggested was not in contemplation, and he was not aware that it would meet with general assent," some importance was, perhaps unduly, attached to the suggestion, owing to the fact that Mr. Handel Booth was known to have received Mr. Lloyd George's secret confidence at the time of the Marconi inquiry, and was supposed still to enjoy it.

On Saturday, May 15, Lord Fisher resigned. On Saturday and Sunday efforts were made to induce him to reconsider his resignation, but without success. On Monday Mr. Lloyd George, armed, as we have seen, with Lord French's documents, and also, we must suppose, with the knowledge that these disclosures had been communicated to Mr. Balfour and Mr. Bonar Law, informed Mr. Asquith that in his judgment the necessity had arisen for the formation of a Coalition Government. And, in its first stage, Mr. Lloyd George was the only one of his colleagues whom Mr. Asquith consulted before he called for the formal resignation of each individual member of his Cabinet, and proceeded with the formation of a new one.

On Tuesday afternoon some leakage of information had occurred, and members of the House of Commons knew that a Coalition Government was going to be formed. A meeting of Liberal members was hastily summoned and met in a committee-room, under the chairmanship of Sir Thomas Whittaker. Strong speeches followed, a coalition was warmly denounced as unnecessary, uncalled for, and likely to be engineered only as the result of a "Tory plot," and a resolution to this effect was actually passed with unanimity. So hostile was the attitude displayed that Mr. Asquith was then hastily summoned by his Chief Whip to address this gathering of disturbed followers. "Certain things," he told them, in mysterious terms, "had happened, certain things had been divulged, certain things had emerged as probable, which have made it necessary to reconstruct the Government."

"Certain things had happened": Lord Fisher had resigned. "Certain things had been divulged": Lord French had disclosed the shortage of munitions. "Certain things had emerged as probable": the probability of a vote of censure by the official Opposition. And although none of the members who heard these words realised their full significance, or understood their real meaning, Mr. Asquith's appeal to their loyalty, closing with an eloquent and heartfelt assurance, "I will not let you down," carried them off their legs. They were content to ask for no statement of facts, they required no explanation, their resolution was withdrawn, and, amidst cheers, Sir Thomas Whittaker pledged them, with their unanimous consent, to unswerving loyalty to their leader, confidence in his judgment, and faith in the coming coalition. Political leaders live for the most part on, and by, the faith of the more simple-minded of their supporters.

On Monday, May 17, five days after his emphatic answer to Mr. Booth, such was the decorative humbug by which these negotiations were surrounded, Mr. Asquith wrote to Mr. Bonar Law: "After long and careful consideration, I have definitely come to the conclusion that the conduct of the war to a successful and decisive issue cannot be effectively carried on except by a Cabinet which represents all parties in the State."

The formation of the Coalition Government then proceeded.

On May 27, 1915, at a meeting of the Unionist Party, Mr. Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne threw some light on the reasons which had induced them to join the new Government. Mr. Bonar Law read the letter from Mr. Asquith which we have just quoted,

justified the silent inactivity which the Opposition, under his leadership, had displayed since the outbreak of the war, and added the significant words that a time had at last arrived when he felt " that criticism must come with regard to the war itself."

Lord Lansdowne was more explicit :

" There have been shortcomings," he said, " there have been miscalculations, some of them probably excusable, and some of them perhaps not.

" We are, all of us, I suppose, penetrated with the conviction that there has been something amiss with what, I suppose, may be described as the national organisation of the country. As to men, we are not sure that we have got enough, or that we are getting enough, or that we are getting the right men.

" As to munitions, I will not dwell upon that painful chapter in the history of the war ; but it is a matter of common knowledge that the failure of the supply of essential munitions has, not once, but many times, interfered with the due progress of our military operations."

On June 7 the new Coalition Government was complete, and met Parliament for the first time.

VI

With the formation of the Coalition Government the political controversy with regard to " shells " came, naturally, to an end. It was revived again in 1919, in retrospect, by the controversy which then arose between Lord French and Mr. Asquith, in the course of which Mr. Asquith stated that his speech at Newcastle was based on a letter to which we have already referred, from Lord Kitchener, in which Lord Kitchener had written : " I have had a talk with French. He told me, I could let you know that, with the present supply of ammunition, he will have as much as his troops will be able to use on the next forward movement." Whereas Lord French denied categorically that he ever gave Lord Kitchener any such assurance.

While we have added these statements in order to complete our narrative, although they add little or nothing to our real information, we have been content to state the actual facts, as revealed in this chapter, and to refrain from comment. And although it is well to remember that criticism for lack of foresight is easy when aided by subsequent knowledge, nevertheless, the general public were never able to understand why the mea-

sures which were thought to be necessary, and were actually taken in May and June, could not have been initiated some months earlier.

However, in June the Ministry of Munitions was formed, with Mr. Lloyd George at its head. Many months went by before arrears were overtaken, and Lord French marched, in co-operation with General Joffre, in the great offensive in September 1915, with ammunition sufficient for no more than seven days' offensive battle. And it was only in 1916 that our supplies were placed on an adequate and satisfactory basis.

But during these months Mr. Lloyd George took the great decision to manufacture big guns in large quantities, contrary to the preponderating advice of expert military opinion. And as week by week supplies grew visibly in volume, as the military deadlock continued, as his political and journalistic friends sedulously repeated, no doubt with perfect truth, that for months he had urged the Cabinet without success to take the necessary steps to increase the manufacture of munitions, so the feeling against Mr. Asquith, and criticism of his unexplained speech at Newcastle grew also, and the winds of popularity, blown from the Army and from the general public, filled the sails of the vessel which carried Mr. Lloyd George and his political fortunes triumphantly on their course. And when, in due time, this vessel with its precious cargo came safely into port, and Mr. Lloyd George became Prime Minister, Lord French, as Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, and Captain Guest, as Patronage Secretary, were given greater opportunities for the exercise of the political talent which they had undoubtedly displayed in May of 1915.

CHAPTER X

EAST OR WEST?

"But there is neither East nor West."
RUDYARD KIPLING.

I

WHETHER Mr. Asquith followed the best and wisest course when he formed the Coalition Government, and whether the continuation of his original Government in power—with a rope round its neck, which could and would, assuredly, have been pulled by the Opposition, if the Dardanelles Expedition had failed—was advisable, are interesting matters for speculation. But we must content ourselves with noting that the fall of the old Government was accompanied by no explanation of the reasons which had led to the formation of the new, that the Coalition Government deprived the House of Commons of the only real power it possesses, namely, that of turning out one Government and replacing it by another; that it robbed the country of a responsible Opposition, and an alternative Administration; that it killed all effective and responsible criticism in the House of Commons, and transferred this function with increased power to the Press; and we must then pass on to the problems which the new Government had to face.

Our offensive on the Western Front, as we have seen, had been unable to penetrate the German line. And while the French attacks had met with more success, and had captured some German positions, they had produced no serious strategic result. While our shortage of munitions and the fact that the French armies were without sufficient shells for their big guns made any renewal of the offensive, on a large scale, impossible for the present.

Meanwhile, the Russian offensive in the Carpathians had come to a standstill on April 20, and at the same time the German offensive against the Baltic provinces had begun. The great

Austro-German drive under Mackensen had opened on May 2, had resulted in the victory of the Central Empires at Gorlice on May 14, which led in due time to the fall of Prezemysl, Lwow, Warsaw, and Brest-Litovsk.

These successes made Lord Kitchener fear that the phalanx tactics of Mackensen, which the Russians had been unable to withstand, might be repeated in a new German concentration and attack on the Western Front, and he was even apprehensive that the German General Staff might then think the moment opportune to hamper our sending reinforcements to France by an attack on our shores.

However, the more positive problem which had to be faced at the end of May and the beginning of June was that of the Dardanelles, and this was rendered the more pressing by the fact that the Russian reverses made them anxious to liberate their armies in the Caucasus. The new orientation of our policy is well illustrated by the fact that the Coalition Government was no sooner formed than the inner Cabinet or War Council which was at once constituted and consisted of Mr. Asquith, Lord Kitchener, Mr. Balfour, Sir Edward Grey, Lord Crewe, Lord Curzon, Lord Lansdowne, Lord Selborne, Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. Winston Churchill, was known as *The Dardanelles Committee*.

As we have seen, a landing had been effected on the Gallipoli Peninsula, but by May 9 the further advance of our forces had been held up by the Turkish entrenchments. On May 14 Sir Ian Hamilton had been asked to state what reinforcements he would require to deal with the new position, and on May 17 he had replied that three fresh divisions would be necessary. While our War Council had, on that date, practically decided that these reinforcements should be sent, the sudden intervention of the political crisis led to the postponement of effect being given to this decision. And as the delicate negotiations over the *personnel* of the new Government took time, and as the members of the new Government were, of necessity, bound to give some consideration to the policy for which they were now responsible, a decision by the new War Council to send three new divisions to the Dardanelles was delayed until June 7, and not ratified by the new Cabinet until June 9.

Now, although counted in days, the period of time between May 17 and June 9 may seem short and even trifling, the effect of this delay on the military operations was startling and even

tragic. Sir Ian Hamilton had calculated that if the forces for which he had asked had been dispatched at once, they would have arrived in time for his attack to be renewed during the first fortnight of July. The attack contemplated by him was a surprise attack at a new point, the success of which depended on its being undertaken on a moonless night, at the end of one moon and before the beginning of another. But the delay in sending the three new divisions, which did not arrive until well on in July, meant that his new attack must take place in the first days of August, and not in the first days of July.

Unfortunately, this was not the only result of this, perhaps politically inevitable, delay.

Between July and August no less than five new Turkish divisions and fresh drafts had time to arrive on the Peninsula. The German control of the Turkish Army had leisure to increase, and the Turkish defences were, in consequence, able to be organised on improved and modern lines. Whereas during the same interval our forces were reduced by sickness and losses which were not made good by the dispatch of adequate drafts. Moreover, the Russian defeats in Galicia in June and July led to the removal of our Army Corps under General Istomine, which had been kept ready to embark at Odessa and Batum in order to co-operate with Sir Ian Hamilton's forces when the Straits had been forced, to the main battle-fields in Russia and thus liberated considerable forces which the Turks had been compelled to keep concentrated at or near Midia, to guard against the possibility of a landing there.

Thus, although our War Council decided in July to reinforce Sir Ian Hamilton with two more divisions in addition to the three divisions, which had already been dispatched, the decisive battle of Suvla Bay was not fought until August 5, and whatever chances of success it may have had on that day would have been indubitably increased if it had taken place in the first days of July.

II

We have indicated in an earlier chapter that the key of the military and diplomatic problem in the Balkans lay at Sofia, and that the intervention of Bulgaria on the side of the Allies would necessarily lead to decisive results. We have also indi-

cated some of the difficulties which lay in the way of this happy consummation of our hopes.

During the period which we now propose to review the importance of securing the co-operation of Bulgaria grew daily more urgent and more imperative. While the attitude of King Ferdinand oscillated, now to this side, now to the other, until the fortunes of the battles on the Eastern Front swayed steadily in favour of the Central Empires, and against our Russian Allies, and until the failure of our efforts on the Gallipoli Peninsula became, at last, beyond dispute.

"What is the actual position?" wrote Mr. Lloyd George, in a preface to a collection of his speeches, in August 1915. "It is thoroughly well known to the Germans and any one in any land, belligerent or neutral, who reads intelligently the military news, must by now have a comprehension of it.

"With the resources of Great Britain, France, Russia, yea, of the whole industrial world, at the disposal of the Allies, it is obvious that the Central Powers have still an overwhelming superiority in all the material and equipment of war. The result of this deplorable fact is exactly what might have been foreseen. The iron heel of Germany has sunk deeper than ever into French and Belgian soil. Poland is entirely German; Lithuania is rapidly following. Russian fortresses, deemed impregnable, are falling like sand-castles before the resistless tide of Teutonic invasion. When will that tide recede? When will it be stemmed? As soon as the Allies are supplied with abundance of war material."

Against the sombre background of this military position, fitfully broken by renewed hopes of success in the Dardanelles, Sir Edward Grey and the diplomats of the Allies from April to September were busily engaged in disentangling the Gordian knot of the Balkans.

During April and May King Ferdinand had been obviously marking time and watching events. But towards the end of May, in spite of the Russian reverses, which were balanced to some extent by the intervention of Italy, the time was thought to be sufficiently opportune, the claims of Bulgaria in Macedonia and Thrace sufficiently just, the need for the assistance of her peasant armies sufficiently great, to justify the making of a formal offer.

At this date, therefore, the Allies offered Bulgaria the uncontested zone in Macedonia at the end of the war, subject to Serbia obtaining compensation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and on the coast of the Adriatic. And further promised all their efforts to

secure the cession of Kavalla to Bulgaria, subject to Greece obtaining compensation in Asia Minor, if the Bulgarian armies would forthwith march against Turkey.

Much could be written of the interplay of politics, parties, and persons in the various Balkan States which followed, but it is sufficient, for the broad effect, to say that Serbia, already irritated by the sacrifices of Serbian interests on the Adriatic made by the secret treaty with Italy, spent the greater part of June in seizing strategic points on the Albanian frontier, and refused to make any accommodation; that Greece entered an indignant protest against the proposals with regard to Kavalla; while Bulgaria played with the offer which had been made.

Then in July, as the German advance into Russia continued, and no headway was made in the Dardanelles, the Allies became more and more insistent in their efforts to meet the wishes of Bulgaria, and at the beginning of August they again offered to guarantee Bulgaria the uncontested zone in Macedonia, by undertaking that any extension of territory to Serbia should depend upon the cession by her of this zone, by guaranteeing Bulgaria the immediate possession of Thrace up to the Enos-Midia line, and by repeating their offer with regard to Kavalla. But the measure of the weakness of her military position was also the measure of the determination of Serbia to make no concession to her hated foe, in whose sincerity she did not believe. Diplomatic exhortations were supplemented by special appeals. The Prince Regent of Serbia was besought by the Czar, by King George, and by the President of the French Republic to make the concessions which had been asked for. But the Serbian Government and the Serbian Parliament turned a deaf ear to all appeals.

Events then followed in quick succession.

The battle of Suvla Bay began on August 5, and by the end of the second week in August the prospect of a decisive victory had vanished. On August 18 General Fichef, the Bulgarian Minister of War, who was reputed to be favourable to the cause of the Allies, was dismissed. On September 6 Turkey was compelled by Germany to cede Bulgaria a strip of territory along the Maritza River, which gave her continuous railway connection with the Ægean Sea. In the second week in September, in a last despairing effort, and in spite of Serbia's sullen refusal, the Allies offered themselves to guarantee Bulgaria the uncontested zone in Macedonia, if only she would intervene against Turkey. But all in vain. Bulgarian policy now moved forward

with automatic precision, and on September 22 the order for the mobilisation of the Bulgarian Army was duly given. Serbia, however, in spite of the perils by which she was faced, and in spite of the entreaties, the cajolery, and even the threats of the entente diplomatists, sullenly declined, even at the eleventh hour, to make the smallest concession to Bulgaria, and with passionate appeals to the Allies for help, prepared with a splendid, if reckless, heroism to meet her fate.

III

The failure of our diplomacy in the Balkans, the disastrous effects of that failure on Serbia, deflected our military policy to such an extent, and its repercussion was so far-reaching and was felt in so many places, that we must revert, with some particularity, to the events which preceded it.

We have already seen that by May 1915 the prospect of a continued deadlock on the Western Front, the fact of the Dardanelles expedition, had deflected our military policy in the direction of the "Easterners." As the importance of securing the intervention of Bulgaria had grown, so the importance of securing a victory on the Gallipoli Peninsula, on which Bulgaria's attitude so largely depended, had grown also; and so our policy had become still further deflected in an easterly direction.

Under these circumstances, and under the conviction that no great strategic result could be achieved in 1915 by the small numerical superiority of the Allied over the German forces on the West (some 2,500,000 to 2,000,000), and with our scanty stocks of ammunition, we sought a conference with the French authorities to discuss the position. This Conference took place early in July, and the representatives of our Cabinet were successful in urging that our operations in the West should, for the rest of the year, be confined to an "active defensive" and that an offensive on a large scale should not be undertaken.

Our War Council, therefore, sent the bulk of our munitions to the Dardanelles, such quantities only as safety required to our forces in France, and all our fortunes, both in the East and the West, were staked on the coming struggle for the control of the Dardanelles. But, unfortunately, the defects in our military organisation, the want of a strong Chief of the Staff responsible for our strategic policy as a whole, instead of the accumulation

of organisation and supply together with the control of strategy in the hands of one person, reacted on our policy as a whole. And, whereas political events of the greatest moment hung on a successful issue to the coming battle on the Gallipoli Peninsula, our War Council was unaware, until it was too late, that although five new divisions had been sent to strengthen Sir Ian Hamilton's armies, his original forces, left unreinforced by the timely dispatch of fresh drafts, were lamentably below strength, while no wise and careful selection had been made of the commanders of the new divisions, and no measures had been taken to retrieve a possible partial failure.

The details of the battle of Suvla Bay must be read in the final report of the Dardanelles Commission, and in Sir Ian Hamilton's dispatches. It is sufficient for our purpose to remind our readers that this memorable and disastrous battle had been decided against us by the second week in August, and that any possibility of success in the future depended on the dispatch of large reinforcements.

But to do this was to seek to achieve the impossible. For although, as we have seen, both the French Government and our own had agreed in July to undertake no large offensive operations in France during 1915, yet a wish, perhaps an imperative demand, to relieve the Russian position on the East, it may be, also, the pressure of poliitcal events on General Joffre, all combined in August to produce a sudden change of plan. And on August 20 Lord Kitchener returned from France constrained or persuaded that the offensive on the Western Front should be resumed. War is a grim business, and under the best of direction those who are responsible are often forced to make it as they must, and not always as they would. The stream of drafts and munitions, which should have flowed East, were at once diverted and flowed West instead. And although Lord French was dissatisfied with the particular sector of the attack which had been assigned to him, and although he had only seven days' supply of munitions for an offensive battle, General Joffre's great offensive south of Rheims and north of Arras was launched.

The battle opened in the early hours of September 25 : the main attack by some forty French divisions in Champagne, a subsidiary attack by some thirty divisions in Artois. These armies were flung forward in the hope that they would carry, not only the enemy's front line, which had been swept by artillery preparation, but even the positions in the rear. In the result

the front lines were stormed, advances were secured, guns and prisoners in numbers which sounded imposing were captured and duly published. The German line was bent, but did not break, no decisive strategic success was achieved, and public attention was not directed to the fact that the casualties in the Allied Armies had exceeded 300,000.

Thus both "Easterners" and "Westerners" saw in what had happened on the Western Front and on the Gallipoli Peninsula, the ruin of their plans on the West and on the East alike.

IV

But before these events had come to a close an unexpected factor and a curious episode intervened, which centres round the French general, Sarrail.

In July of 1915 General Sarrail had been relieved of his command of the Army of Verdun by General Joffre. But in the early days of the war General Sarrail was reputed to have saved Verdun by his skilful operations, and as "the only republican general" he commanded a large measure of support from the "left" in the French Chamber. According to M. Mermeix ("Joffre première crise du commandement"), in the early months of 1915, General Joffre had been criticised for his want of success in various secret memoranda emanating from the Staff of the Third Army commanded by General Sarrail, and advocating the claims of General Sarrail for the supreme command. And it would seem that these criticisms were not without some effect on the French Chamber. The retirement of General Sarrail in July, therefore, and the political support which he was able to command must have made him an awkward complication in Paris.

Now, as we have seen, M. Briand, whose influence in the French Government was, at this time, steadily growing, had, at the beginning of 1915, been desirous of organising an "Army of the East" in order to influence events in the Balkans. In addition to which, one of the committees of the French Chamber, on which General Sarrail's political supporters were well represented, had on August 27 placed before their Government recommendations in the following terms:

Seeing that the massing of Austro-German forces have in view the seizure of the Sofia-Philippopolis Railway, seeing that, in this event, there

is no ground for anticipating that Bulgaria will resist their attempt, that such an enterprise will have disastrous political consequences, and that no satisfactory steps have been taken to prevent the attempt, seeing that all delays and all set-backs increase the danger, and that the issue of the war is bound up with the taking of Constantinople, we ask the Government to take the urgent measures that the circumstances demand, and to organise an expedition which will ensure the fall of Constantinople.

It would seem, therefore, that at this juncture a revival of this policy commended itself to the French Government, as sound strategically and politically, and as likely to provide a suitable rôle for a general whose abilities were undoubted, but whose presence would be most acceptable somewhere on another front than at Paris.

At the end of August, therefore, our War Council was both astonished and delighted to learn that the French Government had decided to form "an Army of the East" consisting of six divisions, and had determined to dispatch four new French divisions forthwith to the Dardanelles under the command of General Sarrail, that it was their intention to land them on the Asiatic shore of the Dardanelles, advance on the forts of Chanak while we renewed our attacks on the Gallipoli Peninsula, and that they wished us to replace the two French divisions at Helles with two divisions of our own, so that the former might join General Sarrail's army.

Good fortune seemed for a while to smile on the luckless Dardanelles expedition. The French proposal was at once accepted, arrangements were made to replace the two French with two British divisions, and to gather the necessary transport.

But just as these plans were maturing, it was found that General Joffre was unwilling to release the necessary divisions until he had seen how his Champagne offensive had developed. For if this offensive were to meet with a great success, every available man would be required to pursue the retreating German armies, and October 10 was, therefore, fixed as the date for the embarkation of the first divisions. The Champagne offensive produced, as we have seen, only negative results, but General Sarrail still tarried in Paris. And as the days went by, the tragic drama of Serbia began to unfold itself, and both the French Government and our own suddenly experienced the clash of divided counsels and were caught in the whirl of dramatic political and military events.

V

As we have seen, the diplomacy of the Allies in the Balkans had been based in the first place on the expectation that Greece and Serbia could be induced to make concessions to Bulgaria which would secure Bulgaria's active intervention on the side of the Allies; in the second place on the hope that the operations at the Dardanelles would result in a decisive success; and in the third place, when both this expectation and this hope had vanished, on the belief that the necessary concessions, forced from Serbia in her hour of peril, would, at least, ensure Bulgarian neutrality.

Indeed, such was the confidence of the diplomatists in the success of their policy that they had actually discouraged the Serbians from anticipating a Bulgarian attack by striking first at Sofia.

However, by the end of September this flimsy diplomatic structure had tumbled down with a crash.

On September 22 the Bulgarian mobilisation began. To some persons this seemed the natural prelude to the inevitable renewal of an Austro-German offensive on Serbia. But so confident were the military authorities, both here and in France, of the possible results of the Champagne offensive, that they had declined to believe that it would be within the power of the German General Staff with all their military liabilities both in the East and in the West to spare yet another army for the conquest of Serbia. But, unfortunately, this belief was soon dispelled. For in the third week in September the concentration of Austro-German forces north of the Danube and on October 4 the presence of General Mackensen at Temesvar was reported. On October 6 the direct attack opened on Belgrade, and Belgrade fell on October 8. And while the Austro-German forces were attacking Serbia from the north and north-west, on October 14 Bulgaria declared war and attacked from the east. On October 19 Vrania was occupied by Bulgarian troops and the railway cut between Nish and the south.

Meanwhile, on September 21, the day before the Bulgarian mobilisation, M. Venizelos had informed the Allies that Greece considered herself relieved from her treaty obligations to Serbia, inasmuch as Serbia was unable to supply the 150,000 men to guard the Greek frontier, which under the stipulations of her

Treaty Alliance she was bound to do, and had asked whether the Allies would supply the necessary forces to make good this deficiency and thus enable Greece to take the field. This the Allies agreed to do. One French and one British division, withdrawn from the Gallipoli Peninsula, began to land at Salonika on October 5 and 6, and were soon afterwards joined by General Sarrail and two additional French divisions. For in spite of a formal protest against their landing, M. Venizelos had intimated that they might do so with his approval.

The French forces at once moved to protect the railway between Krivolak and Veles, advanced into Serbia, and tried to ensure communication with the Serbian Army, while the British division maintained the position from Salonika to Krivolak and supported the French right wing.

Then followed the famous duel between King Constantine and M. Venizelos.

On October 4 M. Venizelos had informed the Greek Chamber that Greece "would not take material measures to prevent the passage of the Anglo-French armies, which were hastening to the aid of the Serbians, the Allies of Greece, who were threatened by the Bulgarians," and that Greece must abide by her treaty. On the following day M. Venizelos was dismissed from his office by the King, and M. Zaimis installed in his place. On October 10, M. Zaimis informed the Serbian Government that Greece did not consider herself bound by the treaty. Hopes of Greek co-operation rapidly disappeared, and Greece began to make military dispositions, which were embarrassing, if not threatening, to the allied forces at Salonika.

Thus the failure to secure Greek co-operation shattered the belated military policy of the Allies. For our military authorities were agreed that a force of at least 500,000, and not a small contingent of 150,000, was necessary to co-operate effectively with the Serbians, and that consequently the cause of Serbia was lost.

These unfortunate and distressing circumstances: the failure of our diplomacy in the Balkans, the refusal of Greece to co-operate with the Allies, the probable doom of Serbia, and the impotence of the Allies to lend her any effective succour, produced, as might be expected, a feeling of humiliation, and even of exasperation in our own country no less than in France.

On September 28 Sir Edward Grey had told the House of Commons that:

If . . . the Bulgarian mobilisation were to result in Bulgaria assuming an aggressive attitude on the side of our enemies, we are prepared to give our friends in the Balkans all the support in our power, in the manner that would be most welcome to them, in concert with our Allies, without reserve and without qualification. We are, of course, in consultation with our Allies on the situation, and I believe the view that I express is theirs also.

This statement had been followed, as we have seen, by efforts to obtain the co-operation of Greece, which not even the bribe of Cyprus, offered by Sir Edward Grey in a moment of despair, had been able to secure. The failure of these efforts occasioned an acute discussion and division in the Cabinet as to what alternative steps should be taken, and the question was accordingly remitted to our military and naval experts for their guidance and advice. For two days these highly placed officers considered their report. But on October 9 they were only able to advise that the balance of the 150,000 troops, which the Allies had promised to send to Salonika, could not reach their destination until the end of November or beginning of December, even if orders for their dispatch were given at once, during which time the Serbians would have been fighting practically unaided against the combined Austro-German and Bulgarian forces for over two months, and probably with fatal results. Consequently they recommended that the only course to pursue was the continuation of the offensive in France, from which they still thought decisive results might be obtained, and a continuance of the operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Upon this advice, owing to difference of opinion, no effective decision could be obtained, and on October 11 a compromise was arrived at under which six divisions were withdrawn from France and sent to Egypt, ready to intervene in such theatre as should ultimately be decided upon, and it was agreed that a general of high rank should be sent to the Near East to report on the whole position from the spot.

Some indication of the distractions and divisions which existed in our Cabinet, when this decision was reached, is furnished by the fact that Sir Edward Carson had misunderstood Sir Edward Grey's guarded words on September 28, and was persuaded that they indicated a promise on our part to render immediate assistance to Serbia. And when he realised that the dispatch of one British division to Salonika and the inconclusive

decision to send six divisions to Egypt to await events, represented the real meaning of our intention to "give our friends in the Balkans all the support in our power in the manner that would be most welcome to them in concert with our Allies, without reserve and without qualification," he resigned, and gave the reasons for this step in a letter to Mr. Asquith dated October 12, in which, after quoting Sir Edward Grey's statement on September 28, he continued as follows:

I cannot understand how England can now abandon Serbia to her fate without national dishonour. Even if we were not so bound in honour, such a course is, in my judgment, a policy of despair and an admission of failure which could only be justified after every other alternative had been exhausted.

Bulgaria will be given a free hand to crush our Ally, all hope of inducing Roumania to come to Serbia's assistance will have been abandoned, and she may even find it to her interest to join our enemies, and every encouragement will be given to Greece to follow the policy of the King, rather than that of Venizelos and his majority in the Greek Chamber The loss to our prestige will be incalculable, and a very grave menace will threaten our Eastern Empire.

I am quite aware of the difficulties suggested in the appreciation of the General Staff of October 9, and I need hardly say that I have no intention of setting up my own opinion in opposition to theirs. Nevertheless, I feel confident that if forces are to be taken from the Western theatre we ought to proceed vigorously with a concentration at Salonika and to use our naval power, so far as may be possible, in order to demonstrate that, however impossible it may be, at the moment, we are resolved to preserve their country for Serbians, as we have undertaken to have Belgium restored to the Belgians.

The result would, I anticipate, be:

(1) That Bulgaria would be weakened in her power to crush Serbia even at present.

(2) The Anglophil and anti-Turkish parties in Bulgaria would be strengthened and encouraged.

(3) Roumania would be more likely to help.

(4) The policy of Venizelos and the majority of the Greek Chamber would be stimulated.

As regards Greece, I think vigorous efforts should be made to compel her to fulfil her treaty obligations. It is on her invitation that we have sent troops to Salonika, in conjunction with the French, and we shall be rendered ridiculous, in the eyes of the Powers, if we are compelled to withdraw and placed in a position of dishonour towards Serbia.

Greece—that is, the King's party—is afraid of the Central Powers; we ought to make her afraid of us. Our naval supremacy enables us to do

this, and for my own part I would not hesitate to inform her that unless she is prepared to continue her policy of joining with the Allies in the defence of Serbia, we will break off friendly relations.

The policy of the War Committee seems to me to lead to no hopeful results. I could understand a policy of limiting all our actions to the Western theatre, and using all our resources there (which is, I think, in reality what the War Staff suggests) and in that way to relieve the situation in the East. But to send an army to Egypt to await action, which may or may not be possible, on the report of a general to be sent to Gallipoli, seems to me the most futile and hesitating decision that could be come to, and one calculated merely to lead to a further dissipation of our forces.

I do not believe that, once Germany has gained access to the lines of communication with Constantinople, it will be possible to maintain our efforts at Gallipoli. Indeed, I doubt very much if our troops can stay there until that event happens. This matter is, in my opinion, put with unanswerable force in the memorandum of Mr. Bonar Law.

Similarly divided counsels existed in France. On October 12 M. Delcassé, having seen the failure of his diplomacy in the Balkans, and having been reluctant to agree to a "forward policy" in Greece, had resigned, and had thereby destroyed M. Viviani's Cabinet. The French Cabinet was accordingly reconstructed with M. Briand as Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, who, as we have seen, had previously pressed a more spirited Balkan policy on his colleagues, but without success.

The controversy as to what policy to pursue was then resumed. The French Government under M. Briand, backed by the powerful support of Mr. Lloyd George in our own, declared themselves whole-heartedly in favour of proceeding with the Salonika project. Once again our General Staff was appealed to, once again they advised that there was no military possibility of saving Serbia, and that the Salonika enterprise was a dissipation of our strength and mal-direction of forces. This advice was accepted by our War Council, and they adhered to their previous decision to send six divisions to Egypt.

Thereupon General Joffre was sent by the French Government to England, and not unmindful, we suspect, of the political influence of General Sarrail, who was in command of the French forces at Salonika, he urged our Cabinet to co-operate in the Salonika enterprise, and, it is said, even threatened to resign his command if we were unable to do so. To this appeal our Cabinet succumbed, to it they gave what amounted to a reluctant assent, and, accordingly, orders were given that four of the six divisions which it

had been decided to send to Egypt should be sent to Salonika instead.

These divisions were then at Marseilles on their way to Egypt, and unfortunately, owing to this sudden change of plan, which had not been expected, they had been sent off without regard to the possibility of their rapid employment on landing, units having been broken up in different ships. In addition to which, no notification had, at first, been sent to Salonika of their dispatch or of the contents of the different ships. When, therefore, these troops did arrive, they had for some time no immediate military value and were only in process of being disembarked by the beginning of December.

But a decision to proceed with the Salonika project involved, as a necessary consequence, a decision to withdraw our troops from the Dardanelles and to evacuate the Gallipoli Peninsula, for not even the most Eastern of Easterners could contemplate two distant campaigns and their drain on our resources. Thus an additional distraction and one more subject of contention was introduced into our Council-chamber. For those who were opposed to the Salonika enterprise were in favour of continuing the operations at the Dardanelles, and those who favoured the new project were anxious to abandon the old.

Now, as we have seen, the War Council had decided to send a general of high standing to proceed to the Near East and report on the military position from the spot. In accordance with this decision Sir Charles Monro had been ordered to take command of our forces in the Mediterranean on October 20, and had received instructions from Lord Kitchener to report "fully and frankly on the military position, to consider the best means of removing the existing deadlock, and to advise whether, in his opinion, on purely military grounds, it was better to evacuate the Gallipoli Peninsula or make another attempt to take it."

By the beginning of November, General Monro had decided, without hesitation, to recommend a withdrawal from the Dardanelles. Whereupon Lord Kitchener, dissatisfied with this advice, went out himself to the Mediterranean, visited the Peninsula and Salonika, saw King Constantine, became converted to the wisdom of General Monro's advice, and more than ever convinced of the unwisdom of the Salonika project.

Reasons of space prevent us from telling the story of the tangled discussions and the violent fluctuations of opinion which followed, in the course of which Admiral Wemyss and Sir Roger

Keyes advocated a last desperate attempt to force the Straits with the fleet before a decision to withdraw our troops from the Gallipoli Peninsula was at last arrived at during the first week of December. Moreover, the details can be read in the final report of the Dardanelles Commission.

But by this time the fate of Serbia had been sealed. The Allied forces, ludicrously small in number, hampered by the difficulties of the country and the absence of roads, scantily provided either with pack transport or mountain-guns, had been able to afford no effective assistance to Serbia, could only be withdrawn with difficulty to Salonika, and were faced with the possibility of a dangerous attack, which fortunately did not take place.

"By the beginning of December," writes General Ludendorff in his memoirs, "the Serbian campaign had brought us close to the Greek frontier. Consideration for Greece, the fatigue of the troops, and the state of our communications, perhaps also other political and military circumstances unknown to me, prevented us from completing our operations with an attack on Salonika. . . . The capture of Salonika would have considerably relieved our position in the Balkan Peninsula."

"But it is clear to me," he adds in significant words, "in the light of subsequent experience, that by such an operation we should not have gained even one Bulgarian for the Western Front, whereas the English, French, and Serbians who afterwards occupied the Macedonian Front would probably have fought against us in France. This consideration continued to weigh with us. The attack on Salonika was always a side-show, and must be regarded as such."

However, the controversy with regard to this expedition still continued. A conference of allied statesmen was held at Calais on December 4; but despite the protestations of the French representatives, Lord Kitchener was determined to abandon the enterprise, and even threatened to resign if it were persevered with, and on December 5 ordered General Monro to get ready to re-embark our forces. Then it would seem that the consideration of a curious political complication turned the scale in the contrary direction. M. Briand in France, like Mr. Lloyd George in England, was the great protagonist of the Salonika venture; M. Clemenceau its great opponent. A withdrawal from Salonika, therefore, would necessarily mean the defeat of M. Briand and the victory of the editor of "L'Homme Enchaîné," with the inevitable result that M. Clemenceau would be called upon to form a ministry of his own. Now at this time M. Clemenceau and

M. Poincaré were not on speaking terms. And it was thought that the advent to power of M. Clemenceau might be followed by the retirement of M. Poincaré and all the consequent and undesirable political commotion. With this dangerous possibility in his mind, moved perhaps on reconsideration, if not convinced, by the persuasions of M. Briand and General Joffre, urged, no doubt, by his colleagues at home, Lord Kitchener withdrew his objections, cancelled on December 9 his previous instructions to General Monro, and brought the celebrated Salonika controversy to an end.

While the Salonika expedition did nothing to avoid the immediate doom of Serbia, or avert the tragic retreat of her armies over the Albanian mountains, the retention of the Allied forces on the neutral soil of Greece, until the end of the war, was justified subsequently by its advocates, as having saved the Serbian Army from destruction and restored its remnants to fight for the Allies, as having closed the Greek coast and islands to German submarines and barred the road to Constantinople, as having contributed, in 1916, to the intervention of Roumania, and in 1918 to the final capitulation of Turkey, Bulgaria, and Austro-Hungary.

Nevertheless, in order that these results might be achieved, certain steps had to be taken: M. Venizelos and his party had to be supported by the bayonets of the Allies against the King and his adherents. Greece had to be blockaded and King Constantine deposed. In short, that policy carried out, which had been indicated by Sir Edward Carson in his letter to Mr. Asquith on October 12, of making Greece "afraid of us." And before "those vigorous efforts" to "compel her to fulfil her treaty obligations," which Sir Edward Carson had advocated, had been completed, and Greece had "come in" on the side of the Allies, assurances had been disregarded, rights set at naught, liberties infringed, threats employed, violences committed, and things had happened which, when known, might give pain to some who had gone forth to defend the neutrality of Belgium, and perhaps even to the souls of some who had fallen for the vindication of the weak.

But then, war is war, and military law has ever pleaded necessity as its sole justification.

VI

Having brought our story up to this point, our readers are more than entitled to remind us that we have said little or no-

thing of the hero of our sketch. But we must, in our turn, recall to their memory that as early as January of 1915, as we have previously indicated, Mr. Lloyd George, like M. Briand, had advocated the dispatch of an expedition to the Balkans and had urged this policy on his colleagues. Instead of following this course, as we have seen, our Cabinet had drifted into the Dardanelles Expedition, which had absorbed no less than 400,000 men, lost us 100,000 casualties, irrespective of sickness, and sadly diminished our shipping and other resources. But although Mr. Lloyd George was a member of this Cabinet, there is no doubt that he had urged the adoption of his Balkan policy as an alternative to a landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula. There is equally no reason to doubt that he now reminded his colleagues, as he now hinted to the public, that, had his advice been followed, a different result might have been achieved.

" I wonder," he said to the House of Commons on December 20, 1915, in speaking of the time wasted in securing an agreement with Labour, " whether it will be too late ! "

" Ah ! fatal words of this war ! Too late in moving here ! Too late in arriving there ! Too late in coming to this decision ! Too late in starting with enterprises ! Too late in preparing ! In this war the footsteps of the Allied forces have been dogged by the mocking spectre of ' Too late ' ; and, unless we quicken our movements, damnation will fall on the sacred cause, for which so much gallant blood has flowed."

And, once again, Mr. Lloyd George's accessibility, his readiness to talk freely in private, perhaps also the indiscretions of zealous friends, allowed it to transpire that as in the case of munitions, so with regard to our high policy and the failure to succour Serbia in time, Mr. Lloyd George's instinct had been surer, his views clearer, his proposals wiser, his energies greater, than those of any of his colleagues.

CHAPTER XI

FIRST STEPS TOWARDS A UNIFIED COMMAND

"But we consider that this co-ordination of the Allied efforts can and must be made more complete, and, above all, more rapid."—*M. Briand, November* 3, 1915: *Speech in the French Chamber declaring the policy of his new Government.*

I

HAVING brought the history of events in our own country up to the end of 1915, we are now compelled to transfer the scene of our story across the Channel, and, for a short while, to indicate some of the political forces which surrounded great generals and well-known statesmen, and some of the political movements which were operating in the popular assemblies, in republican France. For in this chapter, amidst the din of great battles, we have to trace the first beginnings of the controversy with regard to the unified command of the Allied Forces, which played so great a part in the political and military history of the war, and with which the name of Mr. Lloyd George has been so much associated in the public mind.

As we have already seen, during the first months of 1915, General Joffre's leadership of the French Armies had undergone considerable criticism. This criticism had grown in volume when General Sarrail had been "retired" from his command in July 1915, and was not dispelled when an outlet had been found for that eminent general's ability at the head of the "Army of the East" at Salonika. And it was renewed when the great offensive in Champagne, in September, had ended with what seemed to be indecisive results.

However, as long as M. Millerand was head of the War Office, General Joffre's position was secure. M. Millerand accepted full responsibility for all General Joffre's actions and alleged shortcomings, and insisted that all criticism should be directed against himself. But when M. Viviani's Cabinet fell in October 1915, and was succeeded by that of M. Briand, in which M. Millerand

was replaced by General Gallieni, General Joffre's position entered upon a new phase. The pressure for a "reconstruction" of the Higher Command increased, and to this pressure the supple-minded M. Briand was not altogether disinclined to yield. For, as we have already indicated, M. Briand was in favour of a military policy in the Balkans upon which the French General Staff was not disposed to look with favour.

On December 3, 1915, therefore, as the result of this pressure, a decree was issued which appointed General Joffre Commander-in-Chief of the French forces, not only in the West, but in the East, as well; and it was understood that this would be followed by the appointment of a new commander in the field, on the Western Front, who, like General Sarrail at Salonika, would be under the general direction of General Joffre. It was also understood, inasmuch as M. Briand had in his speech in the Chamber on the formation of the new Government developed the idea of "one front," as the basis of the policy which was to be pursued, that this step was but the prelude to the creation of an inter-allied General Staff over which General Joffre would preside.

These moderate and carefully-balanced changes did not silence criticism: "Est-ce une faveur?" wrote M. Clemenceau, on December 4, criticising General Joffre's new appointment, in biting words, which are quite untranslatable. "Est-ce une disgrace où se cache, sous les fleurs, le lacet qui immobilisera dans une niche d'honneur le stratège auquel, se substituera 'pour l'aider' un adjoint remplaçant?" But while his critics were many and able, General Joffre was not without political support. He had friends in M. Briand's Cabinet, he received the influential backing of the powerful newspaper "La dépêche de Toulouse," and moreover, as "the Conqueror of the Marne" he enjoyed a popularity with the Army, and with the general public both abroad and in his own country, which gave him a position not unlike that held by Lord Kitchener in our own.

M. Briand, therefore, steered a strictly middle course through these troubled political waters, and on December 10 General Joffre was allowed to nominate General de Castelnau as his Chief of the Staff to assist him in the general direction of his commands. But this appointment also did not give general satisfaction. For, although General de Castelnau had played a distinguished and successful part in the war, and had earned a large amount of public sympathy on account of the death of two gallant sons in the field, and on account of a devotion to duty which had

kept him at his post in sight of the cemetery where one of them was buried, bitter memories of recent controversies still lingered in the minds of many French politicians, and General de Castelnau was a practising Catholic.

However, for the moment, M. Briand's difficulties had been overcome. By appointing General Joffre Commander-in-Chief of *all* the French Forces he had made him responsible for the Front in Salonika as well as in France, and thus secured reinforcements for his own pet project in the Balkans; he had associated with General Joffre a general of acknowledged military skill; he had secured the support of General Joffre's friends, and retained him at the head of the French armies with undiminished prestige, ready, when the right moment came, to consummate the policy of "one front" by becoming the head of an inter-allied general staff.

But, unfortunately, the critics were soon, as we shall now show, able to find another and more successful line of attack. For the story of M. Briand's administration is the story of the failure to preserve the delicate balance of his policy, and of the success of his critics in achieving, first the fall of General Joffre, and then the fall of M. Briand himself.

II

The north-eastern frontiers of France, through which lies the shortest route to Paris, are guarded by the fortress of Verdun and the fortifications which surround it. The general public had always considered that these fortifications constituted one of the strongest positions in Europe. But as early as July in 1915 one of the numerous commissions, which had been appointed by the French Chamber to visit various parts of the front, had expressed themselves as dissatisfied with the state of affairs which they had found there. Their reports had soon afterwards been strengthened by a similar report made by Colonel Driant, the *député* for Nancy, who held a command in the neighbourhood, and who, in December 1915, had represented to the Army Committee of the Chamber that the defences of Verdun were insufficiently organised. These facts having been brought to the attention of General Gallieni, a formal correspondence (which can be read in full in M. Mermeix's "Joffre") had followed between him and General Joffre in December, in the course of which General Joffre had informed Gallieni, that although in the

IN FRANCE—MR. LLOYD GEORGE, SIR DOUGLAS HAIG, GENERAL JOFFRE, AND M. THOMAS, THE FRENCH MINISTER OF MUNITIONS

region of " Meurthe, Toul, and Verdun, the network of trenches was not so complete as was the case in the greater part of the front," the fulfilment of the orders given by him for the organisation of the defensive positions, " had been constantly inspected by the commanders of the different armies and group of armies under the supervision of the officers of his staff." This explanation had been accepted by General Gallieni, and the correspondence had been closed by his assurance to General Joffre that " the Government had full confidence in him, a confidence which had been proved in a signal manner by placing him in command of the French armies on all the fronts ; and that the wish of the Government to be informed of the position of their armies from all points of view was not to be taken as implying any want of confidence in him."

It would seem, however, that after this correspondence had taken place, General Joffre felt some anxiety as to the condition of the defences at Verdun. For at the end of January these positions had been examined by General de Castelnau, on his return from Salonika, and he had given directions that they should be immediately strengthened.

But while these necessary works were being carried out the great German attack, directed by General Falkenhayn, commanded by the Crown Prince, and accompanied by a tremendous concentration of artillery, had been launched against Verdun : on February 21 the French first lines had been obliterated. On February 24 the heights of Douaumont had been successfully stormed, and it seemed, for a moment, as though the French positions on the right bank of the Meuse could be no longer sustained and that Verdun was lost. On February 26 the German wireless had announced to the world, that " the keystone of the French Front had fallen."

The first news of these untoward events reached General Joffre's headquarters on the night of February 24. According to M. Mermeix, General Joffre had then retired to rest, leaving de Castelnau in charge. When de Castelnau sought to advise General Joffre of what had happened, General Joffre's aide-de-camp denied him access, being unwilling to disturb his chief. However, as the later news became more grave, General de Castelnau became more importunate, demanded and obtained an interview with the Commander-in-Chief, and was immediately dispatched by him to Verdun, armed with authority to take whatever steps he might consider necessary.

There is material, enough and to spare, for more than one dramatic scene, in the events which had just taken place, and in those which followed. General de Castelnau set out at once on his midnight journey to Verdun, having telephoned, first to General Herr, who was in command of the actual positions at Verdun, ordering him to hold his ground, inch by inch, and at whatever cost, and then to General Pétain, ordering him to come at once with his staff to Verdun. On approaching Verdun on the morning of the 25th de Castelnau found disorder, confusion, troops in retreat. Arrived at Verdun, assisted by his staff officers, he rallied the French forces, disposed the reinforcements which had come, launched them in a counter-attack, and stayed the German advance on the slopes of Douaumont. This done, General de Castelnau placed General Pétain in command of the 2nd Army, which, as the battle grew in volume, soon included half of the totality of the French divisions on the Western Front, and brought his mission to a close.

It is not our purpose—for we are concerned with great battles only in so far as they give continuity to our story, and produce political consequences—to tell how Pétain reorganised the defences and stayed the German attacks during March and April, until, at the end of April, he was transferred to the command of the armies of the Centre; how Nivelle then continued to carry on the defence with success, until the joint offensive of the French and ourselves north and south of the Somme, which began on July 1, relieved the pressure, enabled him, aided by Mangin, in October and November to take the offensive, restore the French line to the positions held on February 21, and transform a German attack, which had, at first, seemed to promise so startling a success, into a decisive German defeat.

But before the eastern gate to France was barred and bolted nearly every German division on the West at some time or another, and sixty-two French divisions had passed through the holocaust round Verdun, and the flower of our new volunteer armies had played their part in the hideous slaughter which had taken place on the battle-fields of the Somme.

III

The repercussion of these great and even terrible events, during the course of which the fate of France and the fortunes

of the Allies had, more than once, hung in the balance, was felt continuously during the whole of 1916 in M. Briand's Cabinet, in the Senate, in the Chamber of Deputies, and throughout the whole of France.

While General Gallieni had always shared, to a large extent, the views of General Joffre's critics, this had not prevented him from giving General Joffre, so long as he continued Commander-in-Chief of the French armies, complete and loyal support. But as the evidence with regard to the organisation of the defences at Verdun accumulated, and as he recalled the assurances which had been given, General Gallieni's previous misgivings grew stronger, and ultimately destroyed his confidence in General Joffre and in his staff. On March 7, therefore, he determined to bring matters to a head.

With this object in view he submitted to M. Briand and his colleagues an elaborate memorandum, in which he criticised the powers exercised by General Joffre and his Headquarters Staff, the consequent virtual deposition of the Minister for War, the subordinate position to which, in practice, General de Castelnau had been reduced, and General Joffre's shortcomings with regard to the defences at Verdun. And for all these reasons he formally recommended that :

(1) The High Command should be placed in the position which it ought to occupy, and should be deprived of every pre-occupation other than that of the actual direction of military operations.

(2) The administrative functions of the Ministry should be restored in their integrity ; and

(3) Those commanders should be "retired" who were still obsessed with old theories and practices, and who were incapable of adapting themselves to the circumstances of modern warfare.

These representations, supported as they were by M. Painlevé, who played in M. Briand's Cabinet a part not dissimilar to that played by Mr. Lloyd George in our own, threatened M. Briand with an awkward ministerial crisis. However, he was able to argue, with force and with success, that in the middle of a great engagement the time was hardly opportune to remove a Commander-in-Chief, and effect far-reaching changes in the High Command, which he was ready to admit might have to be considered later on. Moreover, General Gallieni was in a precarious state of health, which made his continuation in office impossible, and whether he did or did not, in fact, resign when his sugges-

tions were not carried out, on March 14, Admiral Lacaze, Minister of Marine, was "appointed Acting Minister for War, during General Gallieni's illness," and on March 17 a "stop-gap" Minister for War was found in General Roques, a personal friend of General Joffre, and popular in political circles.

While, by these means, M. Briand was able to avert a political crisis, and obtain a short breathing-space, criticism still continued, criticism assisted by the fact that the parliamentary commissions in France, which find no place in our own parliamentary system, are armed with powers to summon and examine Ministers before them. And as the months went by, and no changes were made, this criticism spread from the committee-rooms to the lobbies, until in June and July M. Briand was compelled to explain and justify his policy in secret sessions of the Chamber and the Senate.

These debates, however, in spite of the fact that the correspondence between Gallieni and Joffre as well as General Gallieni's memorandum, to which we have already referred, were read, ended in a complete triumph for M. Briand. General Joffre's name was still one to conjure with, and M. Briand's policy of maintaining the Commander-in-Chief with undiminished prestige, so that he might, eventually, preside over an inter-allied General Staff, was endorsed by large majorities. "There have been mistakes," admitted Briand, according to M. Mermeix's account of these proceedings, "certainly; but who has not committed mistakes? Who would not have committed mistakes? Perhaps only those who, unfortunately, are not in the Government!"

To these, and other arguments, the Chamber and the Senate succumbed, and by 454 votes to 80, and 251 votes to 6, expressed their confidence in M. Briand, and the Senate sent to the "soldiers *and the chiefs* of the Army and Navy the grateful homage of the nation."

Nevertheless, M. Briand had only been able to obtain this decisive victory by yielding something to his critics, and consenting to give the parliamentary commissions powers permitting them to inspect the actual fighting zones on the front, which had, up to this time, been closed to them. And these powers provided the critics, subsequently, with material which they were not slow to use.

The life of a political leader is at best always a hand-to-mouth existence. Present difficulties are all-sufficient, future complications can take care of themselves, and may even be left for some

one else to face. Moreover, during the Great War, Time had endless possibilities! A great soldier, a great sailor, might, at any moment, achieve a victory which would make the fortune of his political chief. Small wonder, therefore, that in July M. Briand was playing for time. For he anticipated great results from the joint offensive of Sir Douglas Haig and General Joffre on the Somme. He entertained great expectations from the coming intervention of Roumania. And military success would silence all critics, and make him master in his own Cabinet! Thus doubtless he hoped. But Time on this occasion did not play into his hands, and it was not until after 1916 that others were to benefit by the successes for which M. Briand had waited in vain.

IV

The offensive on the Somme dragged on through the summer, autumn, and winter of 1916, accompanied by heavy losses, and hampered, in its last stages, by the wet weather. The general public, longing for a speedy end of the war, were disappointed with the results. For they were unable to see in the bloody assaults in 1915, 1916 and 1917 the stages of that " single Great Battle," which are so brilliantly described by Sir Douglas Haig in his final dispatch: First, that " preliminary stage of the campaign in which the opposing forces seek to deploy and manœuvre for position, endeavouring while doing so to gain some early advantage, which may be pushed home to a quick decision," and which came to an end " with the creation of continuous trench lines from the Swiss frontier to the sea." Then, " The period of real struggle in which the main forces of the two belligerent Armies are pitted against each other in close and costly combat," in the course of which each commander seeks to " wear down the power of resistance of his opponent and to pin him to his position, while preserving or accumulating in his own hands a powerful reserve force with which he can manœuvre, and, when signs of the enemy becoming morally and physically weakened are observed, deliver the decisive attack." Finally, the last phase, when the other side has begun to weaken, and the climax of the battle is reached; when " the commander of the weaker side must choose whether he will break off the engagement, if he can, while there is yet time, or stake on a supreme effort what reserves remain to him," and when the final victories, " regarded

in a correct perspective," are " directly dependent upon the two years of stubborn fighting that preceded them."

Once again, therefore, eyes were turned towards the East. And once again, guided by the intervention of Roumania on the side of the Allies, some men saw, on another front, an easier and a surer road to victory.

The political negotiations which induced Roumania, after much hesitation, to intervene on the side of the Allies are obscure, and have never been revealed. General Gourko, who was chief of the Russian General Staff in 1916, tells us in his " Russia of 1914-1917," that the Russian Government tried to persuade " Roumania to enter the war in June, at the time when General Brussiloff's advance across the Carpathians was in full swing, and it was possible to count that for one or two months, yet, the Russian Army would have sufficient reserves and materials for the continuation of an energetic advance. But this chance was missed by Roumania; her troops took the field only in the last days of August, during the time when the advance of General Brussiloff was gradually dying away."

General Gourko also throws some light on the Roumanian military plans, which have always seemed so inexplicable to the general public. For he tells us that:

> General Alexieff showed the Roumanian Government that the length of their frontier did not permit of the possibility of their own troops defending it all from enemy invasion, and also did not permit an advance on the whole front. For that purpose it was necessary to transfer the Russian troops to Transylvania, which was then thinly occupied by the Austrians, and to recall the Roumanian troops holding the extreme eastern part of the province of Wallachia, close to the Serbian border, to the line of defence on a meridian a little to the east of Bukarest; both these measures were designed to shorten the Roumanian fighting line, and to free a part of the Roumanian troops for the offensive in the chosen direction. However, Roumania did not take advantage of either course, but began by an invasion on a large front, along the whole length of her frontier.

With these facts before us, it is not difficult to guess the reasons which led the Roumanian Government to pursue the military policy which was actually followed. For under the secret treaty, which secured their intervention, part of the province of Bukovina and the Austrian province with a Roumanian population had been promised to Roumania. And as General Gourko remarks, with sardonic humour, " generally at this time the Allies divided the skin of a bear they had not yet killed."

Under these circumstances it is not altogether surprising that the Roumanians, instead of holding the line of the Carpathians, and preparing to throw the bulk of their troops on Sofia, in co-operation with the advance ot General Sarrail's forces from Salonika, at once invaded Transylvania, which was thinly held by Austrian troops.

While it is possible that the Roumanian Government had good grounds for the belief, which they undoubtedly held, that Bulgaria would not attack, and fight against Russian troops, the premature invasion of Transylvania, and the fact that the Bulgarian Army at once struck at the Eastern Dobroudja, proved to be their undoing. On September 19 General Falkenhayn took command of the 9th German Army, which was concentrated in South Hungary, and by October 14 had completely cleared Transylvania. Concurrently with this movement, General Mackensen began his offensive on the Dobroudja, and these two operations threatened to cut Roumania through the middle. On November 18 a passage into Roumania was forced, and by December 5 Bukarest had fallen. In place of their autumn drama for 1915 —" The Tragedy of Serbia," the German General Staff, in 1916, presented to the Allies " The Tragedy of Roumania."

Fate and the German General Staff were unkind to M. Briand in 1916! And, as if the disaster to Roumania, with all its disappointment to his people, were not enough, M. Briand had to face still further complications at home.

V

As our readers will, no doubt, recollect, General Sarrail had, in October of 1915, after some vicissitudes, been placed in command of the French " Army of the East " at Salonika, and in July of 1916 he had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of all the Allied Forces in the Balkans, which by that time had been reinforced by Serbian and Italian troops.

During this period M. Briand had experienced much trouble in supplying, and inducing the Allies to supply, General Sarrail with the reinforcements for which he was continually pressing, in addition to which, constant complaints had been received that General Sarrail was busying himself with Greek politics to the exclusion of military operations. However, these difficulties had been surmounted, and General Joffre had arranged that in August

an offensive should be undertaken from Salonika, timed to correspond with the intervention of Roumania. But, unfortunately, this offensive had been forestalled by the Bulgarians, who on August 17 invaded Greece, and exposed the impossible position of the Allied Forces at Salonika in a neutral country, which was acutely divided on the question of intervention or non-intervention on the side of the Allies. The crisis came when, on September 12, Kavalla was surrendered to the Bulgarians without a struggle. On September 25 M. Venizelos declared for a provisional government against King Constantine, hoisted the flag of revolution, and ultimately took up his Headquarters together with his adherents in Salonika.

It would seem, however, that in spite of these difficulties, and in spite of the fact, as we suspect, that climatic conditions at Salonika had reduced the number of the effectives, and that other claims had made it difficult to supply adequate equipment for operations in the Balkan Mountains, General Joffre was dissatisfied with the progress of General Sarrail's offensive. He proposed, therefore, to send General de Castelnau to Salonika to inspect and report. Unfortunately, political difficulties intervened. General Sarrail was "the only republican general"; he enjoyed the support of M. Painlevé, M. Malvy, M. Bourgeois and others in M. Briand's Cabinet, and a considerable number of the "Left" in the French Chamber. Under these circumstances, to send a "clerical" to report on, and perhaps to "break" a "republican" general was, clearly, not practical politics. But M. Briand was equal to the occasion. He sent General Roques, his Minister for War; to Salonika, in place of General de Castelnau, and General Roques was able, subsequently, to report favourably on General Sarrail, and thus save M. Briand from an awkward Cabinet and parliamentary crisis.

This difficulty overcome, M. Briand had still to face the old difficulty of the High Command in France. For the critics blamed General Joffre for the failure of the Roumanian military plans, and, in the apparent failure on the Somme, saw only the familiar frontal attacks with their heavy loss of life, and with (what seemed to them) the usual futile results.

But by this time M. Briand had probably made up his mind to yield to his critics. There only remained to decide on the actual general who was to succeed General Joffre. By common consent there were only four competitors. De Castelnau? Foch? Pétain? Nivelle? First of all de Castelnau was ruled out: he

was a cleric, and the political pendulum was swinging to " the Left." A mystery surrounds the elimination of the name of Foch, for at the end of 1916 he was said to be suffering from ill-health, a rumour which does not seem to have been justified by subsequent events. Pétain, it was said, was " difficult " and not well disposed towards General Joffre. He had also expressed himself as dissatisfied with General Joffre's dispositions on the Somme, and M. Briand still cherished the idea of retaining General Joffre with a general supervision over military operations. By this process of elimination the name of General Nivelle was reached. Moreover, General Nivelle, by his skilful defence of Verdun, and by the success of his offensive operations in October and November, had acquired a great reputation and a great popularity. Accordingly, in November, all political roads in France were leading to General Nivelle's Headquarters, and his visitors were returning, loud in their praise.

For these reasons M. Briand felt compelled to satisfy his critics and replace General Joffre by General Nivelle. At the end of November, therefore, he sought a secret session of Parliament, in which he might unfold and explain his policy. In the course of this session, on December 8, he announced that General Joffre was going to take up new duties in Paris, that a new Commander-in-Chief of the armies in France would be appointed, that the armies in France and in the Balkans would be placed, more directly, under the control of the Cabinet, and that the powers of General Headquarters would be curtailed. And on the following day M. Briand " reconstructed " his Cabinet by adding five additional Ministers, without portfolios, and replaced General Roques by General Lyauté, who, as military governor of Morocco, had earned a great administrative reputation. In this new Cabinet M. Painlevé found no place, for he declined to become Minister for War unless his nominee, General Pétain, were placed in command of the forces on the Western Front.

But M. Briand had still another awkward corner to negotiate. He had to persuade General Joffre to fall in with his new arrangement, and this General Joffre was unwilling to do. He was, of course, ready to be dismissed. But he was in process of completing plans with Sir Douglas Haig for a joint offensive in the spring of 1917, and he was not ready to accept a post, however magnificent in name, which would make him merely an interested spectator of the coming operations. However, M. Briand was insistent, and very persuasive. General Joffre was assured that

as chief technical adviser to the Government he could proceed with his negotiations with Sir Douglas Haig, and, of course, enjoy a general supervision of the military operations. On December 13 a formal decree announced that "General Joffre, Commander-in-Chief of the French armies, would fulfil the rôle of technical adviser to the Government in the direction of the war," and on the same day General Nivelle was appointed to command the French armies in the field on the Western Front.

Unfortunately for M. Briand this solution satisfied no one. General Nivelle, not unnaturally, insisted on a free hand with regard to future operations. General Lyauté was not inclined to share his responsibilities, as Minister for War, with another technical adviser. And M. Painlevé, who had been a member of M. Briand's Cabinet, and M. Clemenceau, who was the most formidable of the outside critics, desired General Joffre's super-session, and not his reappearance as Commander-in-Chief under a new name. Another secret session, therefore, was demanded, in the course of which M. Briand was forced to concede that General Nivelle on the Western Front, like General Sarrail at Salonika, would have a free hand in the conduct of operations.

According to M. Mermeix, General Joffre then saw that the game was up, and expressed a wish to retire. On December 27 he was created a Marshal of France, and thus brought a great military career and an awkward political crisis to a close. M. Briand's administration survived the shock of these events for a few months only, and was ultimately succeeded by that of M. Ribot, in which M. Painlevé became Minister for War in March 1917.

During the period which we have described in this chapter Mr. Lloyd George's well-informed but anonymous biographer ("Lloyd George and the War" by an Independent Liberal) tells us that:

> M. Painlevé, the forceful man of France, was in communication with Mr. Lloyd George, and both were disturbed about the direction of the war, particularly in the East. Their point of view was not dissimilar, inasmuch as both wanted to use political machinery to bring about a sort of military revolution in the way of a more vigorous direction of the war." And he adds: "These discussions among the dissatisfied, both in England and in France, did not, for a time, lighten up a gloomy situation or lead to definite action."

But by the middle of December of 1916 Mr. Asquith's Administration had fallen, and had been replaced by that of Mr. Lloyd George, and new men, with new ideas, by newer methods, were free to "lighten up a gloomy situation" by "definite action," and to try the first experiment of a unified command under General Nivelle.

CHAPTER XII

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF MR. ASQUITH'S ADMINISTRATION

I

"The year 1916 was certain to witness some terrific fighting."—*General Ludendorff, "My War Memories."*

WHILE the circumstances which surrounded the fall of Mr. Asquith's Administration at the end of 1916 possess, in their final phase, a peculiarity which is entirely their own, they bear, in many respects, a striking resemblance to those which contributed to the fall of M. Briand. In both cases there is the same background of negative military success, interpreted by the critics as positive failure; the same actors, under different names, occupy the same places on the stage. For the part played by M. Briand, deft and eloquent parliamentarian, honestly seeking to preserve unity by yielding what he could to his critics, hoping for a spectacular military success which did not come, is surely not unlike that played by Mr. Asquith. Moreover, M. Painlevé, full of ideas of "Eastern" strategy, anxious to revolutionise the High Command and himself to control it, playing the dubious part of leading critic of his chief's policy from within the Cabinet, has a strange and almost uncanny resemblance to Mr. Lloyd George. The comparison between M. Clemenceau and Lord Northcliffe is not unreal, and it is possibly one more instance of the good luck which never deserted Mr. Lloyd George throughout the war, that Lord Northcliffe, unlike M. Clemenceau, did not combine the ambitions of a politician with those of a journalist! And General Joffre, that silent, shrewd, "regular" soldier, the hero of the public, yet not wholly without political *flair*, almost finds his duplicate in Lord Kitchener, who might have shared his fate, had not death, in a tragic manner, intervened.

But during the Great War, events and their interpretation by the public made and marred the careers of those men who sought

to control them. And the story of 1916, which we shall tell in this chapter, is the story of Allied successes which were more real than apparent, of German failures which were less apparent than real, of events which led to the steady decline of Mr. Asquith's political fortunes and the progressive rise of those of Mr. Lloyd George, culminating in Mr. Asquith's fall.

At the end of 1915, after prolonged discussions and long delay, the Cabinet had decided to withdraw from the Dardanelles, and embark on a new Eastern enterprise at Salonika. During Lord Kitchener's absence in the Mediterranean, the opportunity had been taken to instal Sir William Robertson as Chief of the General Staff with widely extended powers, and under his direction a most efficient staff had gradually been created. The "Dardanelles Committee" had disappeared and been replaced by a small War Council, consisting of Mr. Asquith, Lord Kitchener, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. McKenna, in which Mr. Montagu was included later on.

But the operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula had drawn into their meshes no less than 400,000 men, cost us 100,000 casualties, and a heavy bill for sickness in addition. This unexpected drain on our military resources brought to a head the question of the numbers of our Army, and the method by which the necessary men should be recruited. This problem troubled the Cabinet throughout the autumn of 1915 and the first months of 1916, for it was hopelessly divided on the question of conscription. Lord Derby's scheme having enrolled many men who did not quite appreciate that they might find themselves, almost immediately, called into the Army, had produced the cry of "single men first," which was followed in quick succession by the conscription of celibates, a secret session (in which the serious shortage of men, particularly in the Territorial Regiments, was disclosed), a bill to extend the service of time-expired soldiers and to conscript youths on attaining the age of eighteen which was laughed out of the House of Commons, and finally by a measure of general compulsion.

Throughout this controversy Mr. Lloyd George had not concealed that, in his judgment, the need for conscription had arisen in the autumn of 1915, and that he had been its consistent champion in the Cabinet. And although Mr. Asquith's great gifts of conciliation had, probably, never been exercised to greater advantage than when he had kept his Cabinet together, and imposed conscription on an almost unanimous country, and

although his Unionist colleagues did not conceal their admiration of the success which his tact and patience had achieved, critics in the Army, in the Press, in Parliament, and among the general public, were exasperated by those Fabian tactics, and felt that they owed the realisation of a long-cherished policy to the vigorous championship of Mr. Lloyd George.

Meanwhile military events seemed everywhere indecisive.

Falkenhayn's offensive on the West, supported at first by a declaration of an unrestricted submarine campaign, which was abandoned after the sinking of the *Sussex* and President Wilson's threat to break off diplomatic relations with Germany, had failed. The Allied offensive on the Somme, although it had saved Verdun, and had resulted soon afterwards in the withdrawal of the German armies to the famous Hindenburg Line, in the first German suggestion for peace at the end of 1916, and in the desperate German expedient of unlimited submarine warfare which led to the intervention of America, had not succeeded in breaking the centre of the German left flank, and seemed to point to a stalemate on the Western Front.

The Austrian offensive on Italy, designed to advance from the Trentino into the plains and cut off the Italian armies operating eastwards on the line of the Isonzo River, had been countered by General Brusiloff's dramatic and unexpected attack, which had driven the Austrian armies from the Pripet marshes back to the Carpathians, captured 400,000 prisoners, compelled the Germans to come to the assistance of their Ally, and enabled the Italians to take Gorizia on August 8.

The ill-advised and ill-prepared advance on Baghdad in the spring of 1916 had ended in disaster. Kut had fallen at the end of April, followed by terrible disclosures of the breakdown of the medical services in Mesopotamia. Yet good in the end had come out of evil. The forces in Mesopotamia were taken out of the incompetent hands of the Government in India and placed under the more competent direction of the General Staff at home. Failure was soon splendidly redeemed, and early in 1917 Sir Stanley Maude was able to destroy the Turkish Army at Kut and take Baghdad on March 4.

At the end of May the battle of Jutland had been won, for the German Fleet never tried conclusions on the surface of the sea again. But the result was a disappointment to the general public, who had hoped for more decisive results, which would have led to the forcing of the Baltic and the destruction of the

German submarine campaign. Moreover, the news of the battle was announced in such a manner as to give grounds for the suspicion that all the truth had not been told, and certain details of the engagement led to an unfortunate controversy between the champions of Admirals Jellicoe and Beatty as to their respective merits. Later in the year the menace of the submarine grew, and as the Navy were unable to prevent occasional raids by German cruisers on the East Coast, Mr. Balfour incurred the severe criticism of the Press. In November Admiral Jellicoe was persuaded to leave the Grand Fleet and, as First Sea Lord, to take up the reorganisation of the Admiralty to meet the new dangers by which we were confronted.

Viewed in retrospect these events, in spite of admitted failures, do not justify the great disappointment of the general public, or the criticism which was heaped on Mr. Asquith's head. But the disaster which followed the intervention of Roumania was a more formidable weapon in the hands of his critics. It is, in fact, to this disaster and the feelings it aroused that some people trace back the events which finally led to the fall of his Administration.

As we have already seen, in August the Roumanian armies, instead of following the advice of the Russian General Staff and invading Bulgaria, in co-operation with the advance of General Sarrail's forces from Salonika, had rushed into Transylvania, to their ultimate undoing. At first sight it would have seemed that inasmuch as Mr. Lloyd George had succeeded Lord Kitchener at the War Office in June, some of the responsibility for the Roumanian disaster would have been borne by him. But throughout the war Mr. Lloyd George was fortunate in his friends, his own indiscretions, and his press, for they shielded him like a spoiled child from the criticism which fell on his colleagues and his chief, and suggested that in this case, if his advice had only been followed and his policy adopted, the intervention of Roumania would have been attended by the happiest of results. And these hints were subsequently supported by the disclosure of the actual document in which this policy had been advocated in September and which we reproduce in full.

D.M.O.

WAR OFFICE,
Monday, September 4, 1916.

I have just seen the telegrams announcing the declaration of war by Bulgaria against Roumania. This is an additional ground for the anxiety

which I expressed to you on Saturday as to the possibilities in the immediate future in the Balkans. I then expressed some apprehension that Hindenburg, who has strong Eastern proclivities and has always been opposed to the concentration of Germanic forces in the West, would direct his attention to the crushing of Roumania, and that we ought to be thinking out every practicable plan for giving effective support to Roumania in the event of her being heavily attacked. We cannot afford another Serbian tragedy. We were warned early in 1915 that the Germans meant, in confederation with the Bulgars, to wipe Serbia out. In spite of that fact, when the attack came we had not purchased a single mule to aid the Serbians through Salonika. The result was, when our troops landed there, owing to lack of equipment and appropriate transport, they could not go inland, and Serbia was crushed.

I hope that we shall not allow the same catastrophe to befall Roumania through lack of timely forethought.

There are three disquieting facts in the situation :

1. Hindenburg's well-known Eastern inclinations.

2. The declaration of war by Bulgaria against Roumania. I cannot believe Ferdinand would have taken this risk where it was quite unnecessary unless he had received substantial guarantees of German assistance in the attack on Roumania.

3. The slackening of the German attack on Verdun. Hindenburg will certainly give up this foolish attack at the earliest possible opportunity. The abandonment of this operation will release hundreds of heavy guns and hundreds of thousands of good troops. If, in addition to this, he were prepared gradually to give ground on the Somme, making us pay for it as he retires, he could transfer several more divisions from the West to the East. He could give up four or five times as much ground as we have won during the past two months without surrendering any vital positions.

4. I can hardly think that the equipment of the Roumanian Army would enable it long to resist an attack from an Austro-Germanic-Bulgarian force, armed with hundreds of heavy guns and supplied with enormous quantities of heavy shell. The Roumanians are very scantily supplied with heavy guns, and I doubt whether their supplies of ammunition are sufficient to enable them to get through a continuous fight lasting over several weeks.

I therefore once more urge that the General Staff should carefully consider what action we could, in conjunction with France and Italy, take immediately to relieve the pressure on Roumania if a formidable attack developed against her. There may be nothing in my fears, but no harm could be done by being prepared for all contingencies.

(Signed) D. Lloyd George.

Military critics will no doubt, in due course, comment on the policy which is outlined in this document, and it is to be hoped

that some day Sir William Robertson's views on the subject will also be disclosed, in order that both sides may be heard and a correct judgment arrived at. But it is not difficult to guess, with this document before us, that the question of sending reinforcements to Salonika revived the old "Eastern" and "Western" controversy, and that the question of the steps to be taken to coerce Greece, necessitated by the presence of the Allied troops on her soil, did not add to the harmony of the proceedings either of the War Council or of the Cabinet.

However, by November of 1916, the public, always hoping for and expecting a speedy and victorious end of the war, was disillusioned; the House of Commons, which had been reduced by the Coalition Government to the level of the Reichstag, was restive; the machinery of the War Council was admittedly cumbersome and capable of improvement; some of Mr. Lloyd George's colleagues were getting on his nerves; some of Mr. Asquith's friends felt that his wish to conciliate differing opinions in his Cabinet had been carried to extreme limits and had led to a growing habit of indecision; many friends of the Government were dissatisfied with Mr. Balfour's administration at the Admiralty; Sir Edward Carson had not hesitated to say, both in public and in private, ever since his resignation in October 1915, that the War Council was ineffective, and to suggest that Mr. Asquith was unfit by temperament to preside over it; Sir William Robertson was known to be complaining that necessary and vital decisions could not be obtained; and last, but not least, Lord Northcliffe had made up his mind that the continuation of Mr. Asquith at the head of affairs would lose us the war, and he was not afraid to say openly and in a widely read press what other men were content to whisper.

II

While, for the reasons we have given, the political weather towards the end of 1916 was unsettled, the storm which finally wrecked Mr. Asquith's Administration blew up suddenly and from quite an unexpected direction.

In November the officials who administered the Crown Colony of Nigeria under the control of the Colonial Office, proposed to sell by auction, land, buildings, and businesses which were the property of German subjects. This proposal led to an agitation

by certain business interests and members of the Unionist Party, who, combining a healthy patriotism with an earnest belief in the policy of Tariff Reform, wished to restrict the sale of these properties to British subjects. Accordingly on November 8 a motion was tabled in the House of Commons suggesting that, "where enemy properties and businesses in Crown Colonies and Protectorates are offered for sale, provision should be made for securing that such properties and businesses should be sold only to natural born British subjects or companies wholly British." An acrimonious debate followed, in the course of which Sir Edward Carson, who led the Opposition, "begged" and "prayed" the Government and the House "not to send out a message to our suffering fellow-subjects—aye, and to our soldiers in the trenches—that the war is being waged, not for the British Empire, but for neutrals."

Now, although the policy embodied in this motion was impracticable and even trivial, and although it was vigorously opposed by Mr. Bonar Law, sixty-five Unionist members voted for it and against the Government. But while this vote, in itself, was a small matter, and did not challenge, directly, any vital policy of the Government, it conveyed a clear intimation to Mr. Bonar Law that quite one half of the Unionist Party were not only dissatisfied with the Government, but might soon rally round Sir Edward Carson in active opposition, and that, consequently, the only safe place for Sir Edward Carson was inside and not outside the Government. Moreover, it set in motion forces which soon led to a first-class political crisis.

III

In spite of the fact that there are still some missing links, which we shall indicate, and which future memoirs must one day supply, so much has already been disclosed, so many indiscretions (notably in the "Atlantic Monthly" of February 1919) have already been committed that it is possible to tell the story of what followed with more detail than is usually available so soon after the event.

For some time before the "Nigerian Debate" the Cabinet had discussed the possibility of the formation of a smaller War Council. On November 18 Mr. Bonar Law had proposed that this Council should consist of himself, Mr. Asquith, and Mr. Lloyd

10, Downing Stre
Whitehall. S

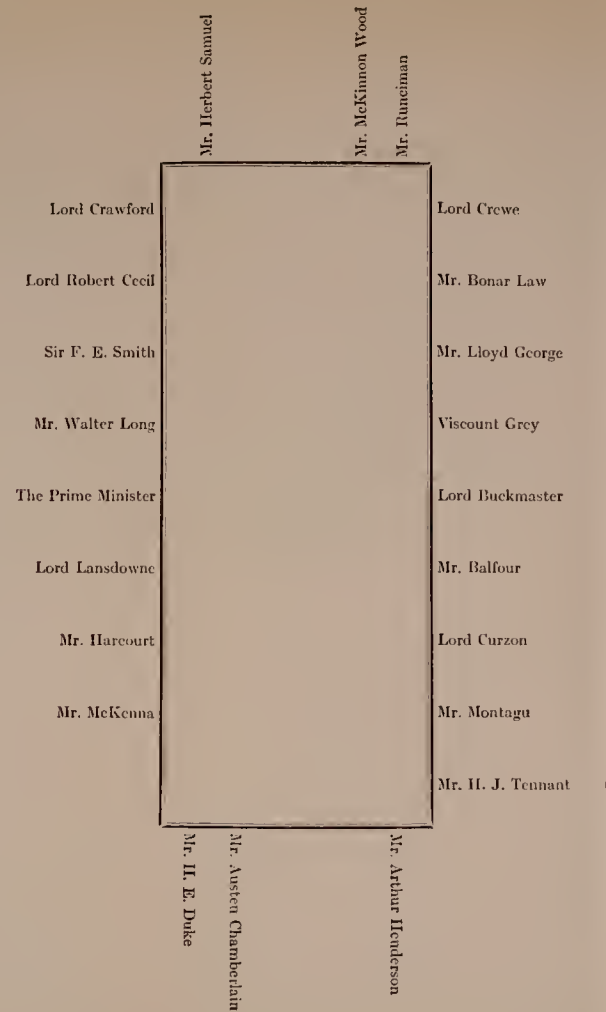
10, Downing Street,
Whitehall S.W.

Buckmaster
A Jas Bellfour
Crewe
Edward Grey
E. J. Samuel
Arthur Henderson
Austen Chamberlain
F. E. Smith
R. McKenna
L. Harcourt.
Lansdowne

At one of the last meetings of Mr. Asquith's Cabinet all the members signed their names in the order in which they sat at the table at 10, Downing Street.

10 Downing Street,
Whitehall SW

10 Downing Street,
Whitehall SW



Buckmaster

At one of the last meetings of Mr Asquith's Cabinet all the members signed their names in the order in which they sat at the table at 10 Downing Street

George—a scheme which was rejected by Mr. Asquith. A week later Mr. Bonar Law had suggested, as an alternative, that a small body of Cabinet Ministers, of which Mr. Asquith should be President, and Mr. Lloyd George Acting Chairman and President in Mr. Asquith's absence, should sit daily in consultation with their naval, military, and other experts, and concern themselves entirely with the conduct of the war. It would seem that Mr. Asquith rejected this scheme also, and further, that it did not commend itself to Mr. Bonar Law's Unionist colleagues, who suggested that two councils should be formed, one charged with naval and military, and the other with civilian administration. Thus, by the end of November the whole question of the reconstruction of the War Council was still undecided and in the melting-pot, owing to the difficulty which had been experienced in solving the delicate question of its personnel. For at this time we must ask our readers to note particularly that, according to the well-informed historian of the crisis in the "Atlantic Monthly," "Mr. Lloyd George had drifted apart from Mr. Bonar Law; so had Sir Edward Carson—a feature of the situation which did not make the Unionist leader's position more comfortable. Carson, the leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons, was in close co-operation with Mr. Lloyd George, the leader of the Opposition inside the Cabinet." In addition to which complications, while Sir Edward Carson was ready to admit that Mr. Asquith might be an indispensable figurehead in order to preserve national unity, he was satisfied that Mr. Balfour ought to be removed from the Admiralty; whereas Mr. Bonar Law declined to be a party to any movement directed against Mr. Balfour, and although Mr. Balfour had offered to resign in consequence of the press campaign which had been directed against him, Mr. Asquith had refused to accept his resignation.

Then a curious figure comes upon the scene and seems to play the part of the man who, from the background, pulls the strings which control the movements of the marionettes who occupy the centre of the stage.

Since 1906 Sir Max Aitkin, whose services were in 1917 fittingly recognised by his elevation to the Peerage as Lord Beaverbrook, had sat as Unionist member for Ashton-under-Lyne. During those years he had played no very conspicuous part in our political life, and was almost unknown to the general public. Nevertheless, he had earned a reputation in Canada, he was

wealthy, he was one of Mr. Bonar Law's most intimate friends, and he controlled the "Daily Express." He also enjoyed the friendship of Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Edward Carson. But he did not move in Mr. Asquith's political circle, which was narrow and exclusive, and it is probable that the two men had only exchanged, on a few occasions and in a casual manner, the commonplaces of politenéss and of courtesy. In politics, as events were to show, he was a realist.

"First"—we quote from the "Atlantic Monthly"—"he reconciled Mr. Bonar Law and Sir Edward Carson. Next, he brought in Mr Lloyd George; and the three spent the latter part of November in secret confabulation, with the Canadian financier acting as host and go-between." But this triangular reconciliation, though important, was not sufficient, for, as the same authority tells us, "During this period Mr. Lloyd George and the Northcliffe Press had not been on friendly terms. As Minister for War, Mr. Lloyd George had not carried out the Northcliffe policy. There was a temporary estrangement. Here again came in the Canadian merger, and proposed a reconciliation between Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Northcliffe. He pointed out that Lord Northcliffe's support was better than his opposition. Therefore, as the price of peace, he had to be let into the confidence of Mr. Lloyd George." When this further reconciliation had been effected, and the alliance more or less complete, things soon began to move, and the negotiations passed from the weaker hands of Mr. Bonar Law into the stronger hands of Mr. Lloyd George. And it is probable that, at this time, Mr. Asquith did not realise the strength or extent of the combination against him, or appreciate the difficult personal and political position which Mr. Bonar Law had to face.

On Friday, December 1—we presume after some personal discussion with Mr. Asquith—Mr. Lloyd George submitted to him the following proposals, which, it should be noted, did not deal with the question of personnel.

Memo. to Prime Minister.

Friday, September 1, 1916.

1. That the War Committee consist of three members—two of whom must be the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary of State for War, who should have in their offices deputies capable of attending to and deciding all departmental business—and a third Minister without portfolio. One of the three to be chairman.

2. That the War Committee shall have full powers, subject to the supreme control of the Prime Minister, to direct all questions connected with the war.

3. The Prime Minister, in his discretion, to have the power to refer any question to the Cabinet.

4. Unless the Cabinet, on reference by the Prime Minister, reverses decision of the War Committee, that decision to be carried out by the department concerned.

5. The War Committee to have the power to invite any Minister and to summon the expert advisers and officers of any department to its meetings.

To this proposal Mr. Asquith wrote in reply on the same day :

Secret

10, Downing Street, S.W.
Friday, September 1, 1916.

My dear Lloyd George,

I have now had time to reflect on our conversation this morning, and to study your memorandum.

Though I do not altogether share your dark estimate and forecast of the situation, actual and perspective, I am in complete agreement that we have reached a critical situation in the war, and that our own methods of procedure, with the experience which we have gained during the last few months, call for reconsideration and revision.

The two main defects of the War Committee, which has done excellent work, are (1) that its numbers are too large ; (2) that there is delay, evasion, and often obstruction, on the part of the departments in giving effect to its decisions. I might, with good reason, add (3) that it is often kept in ignorance by the departments of information, essential and even vital, of a technical kind, upon the problems that come before it ; and (4) that it is overcharged with duties, many of which might well be delegated to subordinate bodies.

The result is, that I am clearly of opinion that the War Committee should be reconstituted, and its relations to and authority over the departments, etc., more clearly defined and more effectively asserted.

I come now to your specific proposals. In my opinion, whatever changes are made in the composition or functions of the War Committee, the Prime Minister must be its Chairman. He cannot be relegated to the position of an arbiter in the background or a referee to the Cabinet.

In regard to its composition, I agree that the War Secretary and the First Lord of the Admiralty are necessary members. I am inclined to add to the same category the Minister of Munitions. There should be another member, with or without portfolio, or charged only with comparatively light departmental duties. One of the members should be appointed Vice-Chairman.

I purposely do not in this letter discuss the delicate and difficult question of personnel.

The Committee should, as far as possible, sit *de die in diem*, and have full power to see that its decisions (subject to appeal to the Cabinet) are carried out promptly and effectively by the departments.

The reconstruction of the War Committee should be accompanied by the setting up of a Committee of National Organisation to deal with the purely domestic side of war problems. It should have executive powers within its own domain.

The Cabinet would in all cases have ultimate authority.

Yours very sincerely,
(Signed) H. H. ASQUITH.

Mr. Asquith's letter can hardly have been satisfactory to Mr. Lloyd George. It did not discuss "the delicate and difficult question of personnel," which was of the essence of Mr. Lloyd George's scheme of reconstruction, for the introduction of Sir Edward Carson into the Cabinet was essential not only to Mr. Lloyd George's and Lord Beaverbrook's plans, but to Mr. Bonar Law's peace of mind, and it conveyed a very definite hint that Mr. Asquith intended to retain Mr. Balfour at the Admiralty, to which both Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Edward Carson were opposed.

It would seem that, for some reason, the negotiations did not proceed further on the Saturday. Both Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George left London for the week-end, Mr. Asquith for Walmer Castle, where it is said he had hoped to meet Sir Edward Carson, who was thought to be staying at Dover, but who, in fact had not left London; Mr. Lloyd George for Walton Heath, which was, unfortunately, not very remote from Fleet Street. The disclosures which have been made do not show whether Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bonar Law, and Sir Edward Carson then met and agreed on a joint course of action. But there is, we think, a presumption that they did. For on Saturday Mr. Lloyd George undoubtedly contemplated resignation, and hinted as much to his friends, inasmuch as the papers on Saturday evening and Sunday morning stated positively that he was going to resign, and "Reynolds," a newspaper controlled by Sir Henry Dalziel, the well-known Liberal member for Kirkcaldy, and an avowed supporter of Mr. Lloyd George, contained a special article in the course of which the writer stated:

Talk of reconstruction has been heard on every side for some time; but only a few people were prepared for the announcement which we make

to-day, that Mr. Lloyd George has intimated to the Prime Minister his intention to resign his post as Secretary of State for War. The actual resignation will probably not be in the hands of the Prime Minister until to-day, it having been delayed at the request of several of Mr. Lloyd George's colleagues in the Cabinet, who are still doing everything in their power to prevent the final step being taken. But it is safe to say that there is little or no prospect of any success on their part.

The cause of the resignation may be briefly stated to be: Mr. Lloyd George has arrived at the definite conclusion that the methods of dilatoriness, indecision, and delay which characterise the action of the present War Council are such, in his opinion, as to endanger the prospects of winning the war.

At the moment there seems every indication of a Lloyd George-Carson combination in favour of the more vigorous prosecution of the war.

Mr. Lloyd George's failure to induce the Government to move in time to prevent the tragic reverse of Roumania is no doubt the final fact that operated with the Secretary for War in coming to his decision.

These disclosures were premature and unfortunate, and informed both Mr. Asquith's and Mr. Bonar Law's colleagues that a crisis was developing, and that negotiations had been taking place of which they were only vaguely aware.

On Sunday morning Mr. Montagu, who was in close touch with Mr. Lloyd George, was so alarmed at the possibilities of what might happen that he at once caused Mr. Asquith to be summoned hastily back to Downing Street, where he arrived at midday. Meanwhile Mr. Bonar Law had called together some of his Unionist colleagues to a meeting at his house. The disclosures which have, so far, been made do not reveal, in their entirety, what took place at this gathering, and it is, therefore, difficult to understand what exactly was in the minds of the Unionist members of the Cabinet. For, while it is agreed that they passed a resolution, which was conveyed to Mr. Asquith through Mr. Bonar Law, that they regarded the situation as serious, that they thought a change must be made, that the publicity given by Mr. Lloyd George to his intentions made any reconstruction from within no longer possible, and that they therefore tendered their resignations *en bloc* to Mr. Asquith, it has been freely said that they also passed another resolution protesting in strong terms against the manner in which Mr. Lloyd George was manipulating the Press, and that, in the whirl of the negotiations, this latter expression of opinion did not reach Mr. Asquith. This point is, of course, of importance, as the latter

resolution would have intimated very clearly to Mr. Asquith that the sympathies of his Unionist colleagues were with him and not with Mr. Lloyd George.

However, be this as it may, in the course of the day Mr. Bonar Law and Mr. Lloyd George saw Mr. Asquith, separately and together, and discussed matters fully with him. And while no final agreement was reached, and while the question of personnel was left over for future discussion, and while there is no doubt that Mr. Asquith was determined not to sacrifice Mr. Balfour and was disinclined to accept Sir Edward Carson, on both of which points he was at issue with Mr. Lloyd George, there is equally no doubt that a general understanding was arrived at as to the possibility of the formation of a small War Council, on the lines originally suggested by Mr. Bonar Law, of which Mr. Asquith was to be President, Mr. Lloyd George Acting Chairman, with Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Balfour, and Mr. Arthur Henderson as additional members.

These negotiations over, Mr. Asquith dined with Mr. Montagu, who, in addition to being his own political god-child, had, as we have seen, been in fairly close touch with Mr. Lloyd George. And from Mr. Montagu's house an official *communiqué* was issued stating that "The Prime Minister, with a view to the more effective prosecution of the war, had decided to advise His Majesty the King to consent to a reconstruction of the Government." Mr. Asquith and Mr. Montagu must have felt confident that the crisis would be surmounted, and that a *modus vivendi* would be found. Yet, almost while this *communiqué* was being written, things had happened which ought not to have happened, and which destroyed all possibility of a reconstruction being carried out under Mr. Asquith.

IV

On Monday morning, December 4, the general public were able to read in the "Times" a complete and well-informed summary of the negotiations which had taken place since Friday. For in a leading article headed "Towards Reconstruction," it was stated :

> On Friday, according to our parliamentary correspondent, Mr. Lloyd George's decision took shape in the form of written representations to the Prime Minister, and these have since been followed by personal discussion

between them. The gist of his proposal is understood to be the establishment forthwith of a small War Council, fully charged with the supreme direction of the war. Of this Council Mr. Asquith himself is not to be a member—the assumption being that the Prime Minister has sufficient cares of a more general character without devoting himself wholly, as the new Council must be devoted, if it is to be effective, to the daily task of organising victory.

Certain of Mr. Asquith's colleagues are also excluded on the ground of temperament from a body which can only succeed if it is harmonious and decisive. On the other hand, the inclusion of Sir Edward Carson is believed to form an essential part of Mr. Lloyd George's scheme, and it is one which will be thoroughly understood.

It is, of course, obvious that the author of this article, while he had emphasised certain facts in order to stab Mr. Asquith, had been placed by some one in a position to write as if he had actually been present at the highly confidential negotiations to which only Mr. Asquith, Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. Lloyd George had been parties.

It is probable that in this disclosure Mr. Asquith saw, at last, the real difficulties with which he was confronted, and began to suspect that "well-organised, carefully engineered conspiracy . . . directed in part against some of his late Unionist colleagues, but in the main against Lord Grey and himself," to which he subsequently referred in his speech at the Reform Club on December 8. For, having read his "Times," Mr. Asquith wrote the following letter to Mr. Lloyd George, in which with some significance he put on record, in the past tense, what "the suggested arrangement was," and apparently used the word "suggested" to emphasise that no agreement had been arrived at and no definite arrangement reached:

10, Downing Street, S.W.
Monday, December 4, 1916.

My dear Lloyd George,

Such productions as the first leading article in to-day's "Times," showing the infinite possibilities for misunderstanding and misrepresentation of such an arrangement as we considered yesterday, make me at least doubtful as to its feasibility. Unless the impression is at once corrected that I am being relegated to the position of an irresponsible spectator of the war, I cannot possibly go on.

The suggested arrangement was to the following effect: The Prime Minister to have supreme and effective control of War Policy.

The agenda of the War Committee will be submitted to him: its Chairman will report to him daily: he can direct it to consider particular topics or proposals; and all its conclusions will be subject to his approval or

veto. He can, of course, at his own discretion attend meetings of the Committee.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed) H. H. ASQUITH.

Mr. Lloyd George's reply is interesting, if disingenuous.

WAR OFFICE, WHITEHALL, S.W.
Monday, December 4, 1916.

MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

I have not seen the "Times" article, but I hope you will not attach undue importance to these effusions. I have had these misrepresentations to put up with for months. Northcliffe frankly wants a smash. Derby and I do not. Northcliffe would like to make this and any other rearrangement under your Premiership impossible. Derby and I attach great importance to your retaining your present position—effectively. I cannot restrain, or, I fear, influence Northcliffe. I fully accept in letter and in spirit your summary of the suggested arrangement—subject, of course, to personnel.

Ever sincerely,
(Signed) D. LLOYD GEORGE.

In the atmosphere thus created Mr. Asquith had to meet his Liberal colleagues; but although there was much "coming and going" in the course of the day, the "Times" article and what lay behind it had, in fact, destroyed all chance of a settlement. His Liberal colleagues were in no mood for a reconstruction which would exclude Sir Edward Grey, Mr. McKenna, and Mr. Runciman from any effective control of policy, and which would reduce Mr. Asquith to a mere "shadow" Prime Minister. And it is probable that if Mr. Asquith had proceeded with the arrangement which had been "suggested" on Sunday night, he would have lost most, if not all, of his Liberal colleagues. Moreover, he was probably determined to retain Mr. Balfour at the Admiralty, and not to accept Sir Edward Carson as a colleague, and it is possible that he had been strengthened in this determination by assurances of support from some of the Unionist members of his Cabinet. Whether this be so or not, after these consultations had taken place Mr. Asquith wrote to Mr. Lloyd George a letter which was virtually an ultimatum:

Secret

10, DOWNING STREET, S.W.
Monday, December 4, 1916.

MY DEAR LLOYD GEORGE,

Thank you for your letter of this morning.

The King gave me to-day authority to ask and accept the resignation

of all my colleagues, and to form a new Government on such lines as I should submit to him. I start, therefore, with a clean slate.

The first question which I have to consider is the constitution of the new War Committee.

After full consideration of the matter in all its aspects, I have come decidedly to the conclusion that it is not possible that such a Committee could be made workable and effective without the Prime Minister as its Chairman. I quite agree that it will be necessary for him, in view of the other calls upon his time and energy, to delegate from time to time the Chairmanship to another Minister as his representative and *locum tenens* ; but (if he is to retain the authority which corresponds to his responsibility as Prime Minister) he must continue to be, as he always has been, its permanent President. I am satisfied, on reflection, that any other arrangement (such, for instance, as the one which I indicated to you in my letter of to-day) would be found in experience impracticable, and incompatible with the retention of the Prime Minister's final and supreme control.

The other question, which you have raised, relates to the personnel of the Committee. Here again, after deliberate consideration, I find myself unable to agree with some of your suggestions. I think we both agree that the First Lord of the Admiralty must, of necessity, be a member of the Committee. I cannot (as I told you yesterday) be a party to any suggestion that Mr. Balfour should be displaced. The technical side of the Board of Admiralty has been reconstituted, with Sir John Jellicoe as First Sea Lord. I believe Mr. Balfour to be, under existing conditions, the necessary head of the Board. I must add that Sir Edward Carson (for whom personally, and in every other way, I have the greatest regard) is not, from the only point of view which is significant to me (namely, the most effective prosecution of the war), the man best qualified among my colleagues, present or past, to be a member of the War Committee.

I have only to say, in conclusion, that I am strongly of opinion that the War Committee (without any disparagement of the existing Committee, which in my judgment is a most efficient body, and has done, and is doing, invaluable work) ought to be reduced in number : so that it can sit more frequently, and overtake more easily the daily problems with which it has to deal. But, in any reconstruction of the Committee, such as I have, and have for some time past had in view, the governing consideration to my mind is the special capacity of the men who are to sit on it for the work which it has to do.

That is a question which I must reserve for myself to decide.

Yours very sincerely,
(Signed) H. H. ASQUITH.

Mr. Lloyd George accepted the challenge, and on the following day replied in a letter, which can best be described, in terms familiar to lawyers, as "a letter before action," in which it is

interesting to find that reference to the sad case of Roumania appears for the first time in the controversy.

War Office, S.W.
Tuesday, December 5, 1916.

My dear Prime Minister,

I received your letter with some surprise. On Friday I made proposals which involved not merely your retention of the Premiership, but the supreme control of the war, whilst the executive functions, subject to that supreme control, were left to others. I thought you then received these suggestions favourably. In fact, you yourself proposed that I should be the Chairman of this Executive Committee, although as you know I never put forward that demand. On Saturday you wrote me a letter in which you completely went back on that proposition. You sent for me on Sunday and put before me other proposals; these proposals you embodied in a letter to me on Monday:

> The Prime Minister to have supreme and effective control of War Policy.
>
> The agenda of the War Committee will be submitted to him: its Chairman will report to him daily: he can direct it to consider particular topics or proposals; and all its conclusions will be subject to his approval or veto. He can, of course, at his own discretion attend meetings of the Committee.

These proposals safeguarded your position and power as Prime Minister in every particular. I immediately wrote you accepting them "in letter and in spirit." It is true that on Sunday I expressed views as to the constitution of the Committee, but these were for discussion. To-day you have gone back on your own proposals.

I have striven my utmost to cure the obvious defects of the War Committee without overthrowing the Government. As you are aware, on several occasions during the last two years I have deemed it my duty to express profound dissatisfaction with the Government's method of conducting the war. Many a time, with the road to victory open in front of us, we have delayed and hesitated whilst the enemy were erecting barriers that finally checked the approach. There has been delay, hesitation, lack of forethought and vision. I have endeavoured repeatedly to warn the Government of the dangers, both verbally and in written memoranda and letters, which I crave your leave now to publish if my action is challenged; but I have either failed to secure decisions or I have secured them when it was too late to avert the evils. The latest illustration is our lamentable failure to give timely support to Roumania.

I have more than once asked to be released from my responsibility for a policy with which I was in thorough disagreement, but at your urgent personal request I remained in the Government. I realise that when the country is in the peril of a great war, Ministers have not the same freedom to resign on disagreement. At the same time, I have always felt—and

felt deeply—that I was in a false position inasmuch as I could never defend in a whole-hearted manner the action of a Government of which I was a member. We have thrown away opportunity after opportunity, and I am convinced, after deep and anxious reflection, that it is my duty to leave the Government in order to inform the people of the real condition of affairs and to give them an opportunity before it is too late to save their native land from a disaster which is inevitable if the present methods are longer persisted in. As all delay is fatal in war, I place my office without further parley at your disposal.

It is with great personal regret that I have come to this conclusion. In spite of mean and unworthy insinuations to the contrary—insinuations which I fear are always inevitable in the case of men who hold prominent but not primary positions in any administration—I have felt a strong personal attachment to you as my Chief. As you yourself said on Sunday, we have acted together for ten years and never had a quarrel, although we have had many a grave difference on questions of policy. You have treated me with great courtesy and kindness; for all that I thank you. Nothing would have induced me to part now except an overwhelming sense that the course of action which has been pursued has put the country —and not merely the country, but throughout the world, the principles for which you and I have always stood throughout our political lives—in the greatest peril that has ever overtaken them.

As I am fully conscious of the importance of preserving national unity. I propose to give your Government complete support in the vigorous prosecution of the war; but unity without action is nothing but futile carnage, and I cannot be responsible for that. Vigour and vision are the supreme need at this hour.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed) D. Lloyd George.

Other letters followed in quick succession, showing that Mr. Lloyd George was anxious to put his case before the public as soon as possible:

Private

10, Downing Street, S.W.
Tuesday, December 5, 1916.

My dear Lloyd George,

I need not tell you that I have read your letter of to-day with much regret.

I do not comment upon it for the moment, except to say that I cannot wholly accept your account of what passed between us in regard to my connection with the War Committee.

In particular, you have omitted to quote the first and most material part of my letter of yesterday.

Yours very sincerely,
(Signed) H. H. Asquith.

In the meantime, I feel sure that you will see the obvious necessity, in the public interest, of not publishing at this moment any part of our correspondence.

War Office, S.W.
Tuesday, December 5, 1916.

My dear Prime Minister,

I cannot announce my resignation without assigning the reason. Your request that I should not publish the correspondence that led up to, and necessitated it, places me therefore in an embarrassing and unfair position. I must give reasons for the grave step I have taken. If you forbid publication of the correspondence do you object to my stating in another form my version of the causes that led to my resigning?

Yours sincerely,
(Signed) D. Lloyd George.

As to the first part of your letter, the publication of the letters would cover the whole ground.

10, Downing Street, S.W.
Tuesday, December 5, 1916.

My dear Lloyd George,

It may make a difference to you (in reply to your last letter) if I tell you at once that I have tendered my resignation to the King.

In any case I should deprecate in the public interest the publication in its present form at this moment of your letters to me of this morning.

Of course I have neither the power nor the wish to prevent your stating in some other form the causes which have led you to take the step which you have taken.

Yours very sincerely,
(Signed) H. H. Asquith.

Thus by Tuesday, December 5, the political deadlock was complete. For, although Mr. Asquith had resigned, and the King had, on his recommendation, sent for Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Bonar Law made no real attempt to form an Administration of his own.

The first phase of the crisis was over.

A curious sidelight is thrown on a still more curious story by the fact that the correspondence between Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George, always accompanied by Mr. Lloyd George's memorandum on his Roumanian policy, was very soon made available to certain highly placed journalists and other important persons, and was ultimately published in full in the pages of the "Atlantic Monthly" of February 1919. When this latter publication appeared Mr. Asquith's secretaries were able to complete their dossier of these great events by including one of Mr. Asquith's letters of which no copy had been taken at the time.

V

It is probable that when Mr. Asquith resigned he felt that he would nevertheless be recalled to power, and asked to form an Administration. He possessed a majority in the House of Commons. He had received friendly assurances from his Unionist colleagues, some of whom had, it is said, gone so far as to describe Mr. Lloyd George's tirade with regard to Roumania as "entirely false." He had added to his difficulties by his loyal support of Mr. Balfour. And yet, so strange are the inner workings of politics, so curious the psychology of politicians, that it was Mr. Balfour, as events were to show, who made possible the formation of Mr. Lloyd George's Government.

On December 6 the King summoned a conference at which Mr. Asquith, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. Arthur Henderson were present, and as a result of this conference Mr. Lloyd George undertook to endeavour to form an Administration, with the co-operation of Mr. Bonar Law.

The support of the Labour Party was easily secured. A few vague promises with regard to the nationalisation of shipping and of mines, a few offices placed at their disposal, an appeal to patriotism, and the thing was done. With the exception of a few of Mr. Asquith's old colleagues, who were not wanted and had become personally distasteful to Mr. Lloyd George, most of the Liberals felt that the King's Government had to be carried on and were ready to help in any capacity. The Unionists presented a more difficult problem. For while a large section of the Unionist Party were with Mr. Lloyd George, heart and soul, many of the Unionist members of the Cabinet were not pleased with Mr. Lloyd George's treatment of Mr. Asquith, and did not like some of Mr. Lloyd George's friends. In addition to which, they had grave doubts of the stability of any Government he might form. However, on the way back from the Conference at Buckingham Palace Mr. Bonar Law had brought off a great political coup. He had induced Mr. Balfour to serve as Foreign Secretary in Mr. Lloyd George's new Administration. This was decisive, for loyalty to Mr. Balfour retained the services of Lord Robert Cecil. And every Unionist who was wanted was ready to rush in where both Mr. Balfour and Lord Robert Cecil were not unwilling to tread.

On December 11 Mr. Lloyd George's Government was announced as follows :

THE WAR CABINET

Mr. D. Lloyd George . .	Prime Minister.
Lord Curzon . . .	Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Lords.
Mr. Henderson . . .	Without portfolio.
Lord Milner . . .	Without portfolio.

Mr. Bonar Law, Chancellor of the Exchequer, who has been asked by the Prime Minister to act as leader of the House of Commons, will also be a member, but will not be expected to attend regularly.

Of those who were included under the heading of "other Ministers" it is sufficient to notice that Mr. Balfour was Foreign Secretary, and Sir Edward Carson First Lord of the Admiralty.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FIRST EXPERIMENT OF A UNIFIED COMMAND

"Notwithstanding the successful close of the year 1916, the outlook for the coming year was exceedingly grave. . . .

"If the war lasted, our defeat seemed inevitable. Economically we were in a highly unfavourable position for a war of exhaustion. Questions of the supply of foodstuffs caused great anxiety, and so, too, did questions of *moral*. The future looked dark, and our only comfort was to be found in the proud thought that we had hitherto succeeded in defying so superior an enemy, and that our line was everywhere beyond our frontiers."—*General Ludendorff.* "*My War Memories.*"

I

THE outlook for 1917 was, on the whole, favourable to the Allies.

On the Western Front, the German attack on Verdun had ended in a costly failure. The battles of the Somme had bent, if they had not broken, the German lines, had compelled the retreat which ultimately took place in March 1917 to the famous "Hindenburg" positions, and had left 154 German divisions to face 190 Allied divisions, armed with all those resources of material which our command of the sea had enabled us to gather from all over the world.

On the Eastern Front the combined efforts of Hindenburg and Ludendorff had not been able to destroy the Russian armies. Russia was preparing new formations from her endless supply of men and getting ready for a new offensive.

On the Isonzo Front the Italians were preparing another attack. In Macedonia the Allies had taken Florina and Monastir at the end of 1916, and were getting ready for a further advance. On every front therefore, East and West, on the Isonzo and in Macedonia, Germany and her Allies had to expect that offensives would be launched against them in the spring of 1917.

In addition, the grip of our blockade was tightening every month, and some day we shall know the extent of the privations imposed by it on the German civilian population. For even at the end of 1916 Ludendorff tells us that "G.H.Q. had often temporarily to reduce the rations of meat, bread, potatoes, and

fats" of the fighting forces, that "the men usually did not have enough even when they received the full ration," and that "at home the depot troops did not get enough to eat, and this gave rise to a lot of trouble." Indeed, so grave was the position that on August 28, 1916, Hindenburg and Ludendorff had been recalled from the scene of their exploits on the Eastern Front and placed in supreme control of the German forces, in order to restore the falling fortunes of their country.

At the end of 1916 no one realised that the civilisation of Russia was breaking under the strain of the war. No one anticipated that Ludendorff would soon find, to quote his own words, that the Russian revolution "was to bring considerable relief to them in the extremely difficult position in which they were placed," and that he would soon be able to feel "as though a weight had been removed from his chest." No one foresaw that the coming military breakdown of Russia in 1917 would make it possible for Hindenburg and Ludendorff, in 1918, to try to repeat the attempts of 1914, 1915, and 1916 to win a decisive victory in the West. No one dreamt that the spirit of the Russian revolution would permeate the German people at home. It is probable also that our Government did not suspect that the German Government, in their desperation, would embark on an unlimited submarine campaign, and make the Allies a present of the unlimited material resources and the infinite moral support of the United States of America.

And so the story of 1917 is the story of a failure on the Western Front, which was nearly a disaster; of an autumn drama in Italy, which was almost a reproduction of the Serbian and Roumanian tragedies in 1915 and 1916; of the loss of revolutionary Russia as an Ally, and the gain of the Russian revolution as a disintegrating influence on the German people; and of a struggle with the German submarines, which only ended in the decisive victory of the British Navy and the British Merchant Marine after the issue had hung for some months in the balance.

II

There is no reason to doubt that on his accession to power Mr. Lloyd George, if he had had a free hand, would have made changes in the higher command, and developed some strategical ideas of his own.

Before Mr. Asquith's fall in December efforts had been made without success, to persuade Sir William Robertson to undertake a special mission to Russia, which would have ensured his absence from his post for some months. The policy of superseding Sir Douglas Haig had also been considered. Mr. Kennedy Jones, the Unionist member for Hornsey, whose old connection with the Northcliffe Press makes his testimony of considerable value, told the House of Commons on January 23, 1918, that—

Most people knew that after the Somme campaign in 1916 there was the greatest possible dissatisfaction with the Commander-in-Chief. He had not gained the objectives which he said he would gain, and he had sacrificed more men than he said would be necessary. It was a perfectly well-known fact in every newspaper office in London that the Cabinet of the first Coalition Government, then in power, were dissatisfied with Sir Douglas Haig, and that in the beginning of 1917, when the present Coalition Government came into power, they were going to dispense with him.

It was also a perfectly well-known fact that the reason why they did not do so was that they were afraid they would provoke great newspaper criticism. Sir Douglas Haig then said that if he were let alone, if he got so many men, if he were allowed to pursue the campaign he had devised, he would guarantee certain results by October 1917. He said that to every person who went to see him in France. Hence arose the great " peace by Christmas " campaign that did not materialise.

There is equally no reason to doubt that Mr. Lloyd George was not in favour of a great offensive on the Western Front in 1917; and that at the Allied Conference at Rome in January 1917 he advocated an offensive against Austria through Laibach, which was, presumably, to be supported by British and French troops. But while this policy was, not unnaturally, approved by General Cadorna, our prevailing military, political, and, above all, our newspaper opinion, was almost entirely on the side of the " Westerners." And on January 8, 1917, the day after the unanimity of the proceedings at Rome had been officially announced, the well-informed " Times," in a leading article headed " The Decisive Front," gave an ominous and thinly disguised hint of the opposition that would be given to any diversion of forces from the Western Front.

" It is on the West," ran this article, " where the largest part of the German forces have always been posted, where the Germans have accumulated the greatest number of guns, and the biggest stores of ammunition,

and where they have lavished in a greater degree than anywhere else all the resources of military science in its most modern forms, that the main decision must take place. It is all-important, therefore, that our superiority upon this front should steadily increase. The victory of General Nivelle shows that, with skilled preparation and good leading, very telling blows may already be delivered there at a cost which is comparatively slight. . . .

"General Nivelle and Field-Marshal Haig are doubtless engaged in perfecting their plans for that end, and the co-operation of the British and French forces will be closer than ever in the coming campaign. No pains should be spared to make the blow smashing and decisive, and it is, therefore, indispensable that we should not only be in overwhelming force at the decisive point, but able to follow up in force our initial advantages. The German armies must be broken up, captured, or destroyed. . . .

"These considerations are indeed elementary, but they also are essential. We trust that they are constantly present in the minds of those who are responsible for the conduct of the war. We must run no risk by dissipating our forces."

It is impossible to say how seriously the Laibach plan was discussed, or how soon after the Rome Conference it was discarded. But attention was soon concentrated on a spring offensive on the Western Front.

In November of 1916 General Joffre and Sir Douglas Haig had settled the main lines of their joint plans for their coming operations in the spring. In December, as we have seen, General Joffre was replaced by General Nivelle, and these plans were then adapted by General Joffre's successor to meet the new conditions which had arisen.

The story of General Nivelle's offensive is still a matter of bitter controversy between his partisans on the one side and those of M. Painlevé on the other. While conflicting accounts can be found in Major Civrieux's "The Truth about the Offensive on April 16, 1917," M. Mermeix's "L'Affaire Nivelle," M. Painlevé's speech in the French Chamber on October 10, 1917, and in the report of the secret debates held in the French Parliament. Nevertheless, it is possible to follow the outlines of the story without becoming a combatant on either side.

General Nivelle's plan was that of an unlimited offensive. The British armies were to attack from Arras eastward in the direction of Cambrai, and to contain as many German divisions as possible. The main blow was to be struck by the French armies, who were to break through the German lines between Vailly and

Rheims, while another "push" east of Rheims was intended to widen the breach still further, and shatter a German front of fifty miles.

On December 21 General Nivelle wrote to Sir Douglas Haig, asking for the co-operation of the British armies in this plan:

> To enable him to form at once the manœuvre armies necessary for decisive battle; to undertake, on the front which had been considered, a sufficiently large and powerful attack to absorb a considerable portion of the German reserves; to participate in the general exploitation of the results of the decisive battle fought in another region, by completing the disorganisation of the forces on the British front of attack, and to take part in the pursuit of the enemy in a zone which they would together fix later,

and also asking Sir Douglas Haig to extend the British front, in order to make French troops available as reserves for his army of manœuvre. Negotiations followed, from which it would seem that Sir Douglas Haig was unwilling to extend his line unless he was reinforced with six extra divisions from home, and that these and other difficulties led Mr. Lloyd George to urge the desirability of a unified command.

On February 25, 1917, therefore, an Allied Conference was held at Calais. A project was then signed by which the British and French Governments agreed that the direction of the coming offensive should be entrusted to General Nivelle, and that an effective *liaison* should be established between his staff and that of Sir Douglas Haig. This agreement had hardly been completed before Hindenburg began his famous retreat on the front of the British army. The disclosures which have been made do not reveal to what extent Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson differed from General Nivelle. But while it would certainly seem that they both thought that the German retreat had made necessary a modification of the original plans, we must assume that they raised no vital objections. For on January 10, 1918, Mr. Lambert, M.P., asked Mr. Lloyd George whether "His Majesty's Government, when early in 1917 it instructed Sir Douglas Haig to readjust the plans for the 1917 campaign, which had been unanimously agreed on in November 1916 by the military representatives of the Allied Powers, first consulted and ascertained whether Sir Douglas Haig approved of such readjustment," and Mr. Bonar Law replied that "the readjustment of military plans referred to was made after full consultation and in agreement

with the Commander-in-Chief at a conference between the British and French Governments and their military advisers." It would seem also that some little friction or misunderstanding arose soon after the Calais Conference, for on February 27 M. Briand complained to our War Cabinet of Sir Douglas Haig's attitude and urged that General Wilson should be at once attached to General Nivelle's Headquarters in order to ensure an effective *liaison*. This complaint led to a further conference at which Sir Douglas Haig agreed to the unified command, subject to the reservation that it should be "nevertheless understood that if he was thoroughly decided to apply the Calais agreement in the spirit and in the letter, the British Army and its Commander-in-Chief would be considered by General Nivelle as allies and not as subordinates, except during the special operations which were outlined at the Calais Conference."

We assume that preparations for the coming offensive then went forward smoothly, inasmuch as events were to show that Sir Douglas Haig acted in complete and loyal co-operation with General Nivelle.

Unfortunately, from this time onward, ill-luck dogged the footsteps of the Allies.

In order to arouse the martial spirit of his troops, General Nivelle had given to his regimental leaders written indications of his plans for the coming offensive. In February 1917 the German 3rd Army had undertaken a local operation on the old battle-fields of Champagne. This operation was successful, and amongst the captured material an order of the 2nd French Infantry Division was found, which pointed clearly to a great offensive on the Aisne for April. This, according to General Ludendorff, "gave them an extremely important clue. Little attention was then paid to rumours of attack in Lorraine and the Sundgau." The fact that this document had been captured was known at French Headquarters before the attack began, but was not brought to the attention of the French Government until April 20.

M. Briand's Government fell in March, and was replaced by that of M. Ribot, in which M. Painlevé became Minister for War. M. Painlevé, as our readers will remember, had left M. Briand's Administration in December 1916, as he had then insisted that his nominee, General Pétain, should be placed in command of the French forces instead of General Nivelle. And we must note that French military and political opinion were then, and continued to be, seriously divided as to the rival merits of the

cautious tactics which were said to be advocated by Foch and Pétain, and the more dashing methods which were associated with the names of Mangin and Nivelle.

It is also necessary to call attention to the fact that M. Painlevé's critics assert that when he became Minister for War, he immediately began to interview commanders of the different armies, who raised doubt in his mind as to the policy of the coming offensive. But whether this be true or false, it is admitted that so serious were the divisions of opinion with regard to the wisdom of the coming operations, that on April 6 a Council of War was held at Compiègne, at which President Poincaré, M. Ribot, M. Painlevé, M. Thomas, Admiral Lacaze, and Generals Nivelle, de Castelnau, Franchet d'Espérey, Pétain, and Micheler were present.

At this Council, according to Major Civrieux, M. Painlevé suggested that new facts had intervened, that the Russian revolution had broken out, that America had sided with the Allies, and asked "whether it was opportune, in these conditions, to engage in operation on such a large scale?" And after some further discussion M. Painlevé declared "that it was agonising to play one's last trump on a throw of the dice."

The generals present were then requested to give their opinions. We quote again from Major Civrieux:

> General de Castelnau, who was first questioned, approved of the offensive. General Franchet d'Espérey was more reserved. General Micheler, after a long discussion, recognised that the Allies were obliged to take the offensive. General Pétain, who spoke last, said: "We have sufficient forces to carry the first enemy lines. Have we sufficient forces to push the operation farther? No." He concluded by expressing an opinion in favour of a limited offensive.

General Nivelle, feeling that he had lost the confidence of his political chiefs, then placed his resignation in the hands of M. Poincaré; but his resignation was not accepted.

On the following day General Nivelle again wrote tendering his resignation, but again it was refused.

Twenty-four hours later General Allenby's attack on Arras was launched.

III

At first all went well. Allenby's army stormed important positions. The advanced German divisions gave way. Heights

were seized which dominated the country far to the east. "The battle of Arras on April 9," writes General Ludendorff, "was a bad beginning for the decisive struggle of this year. . . . A day like April 9 threw all calculations to the winds." Many of our soldiers, who were present at this battle, have always contended that if our reserves had been at once thrown in, decisive results might have been obtained. But the disclosures which have so far been made do not reveal whether Sir Douglas Haig's objectives had been strictly limited by General Nivelle.

On April 11 Mouchy was taken. On April 12 the Germans were compelled to evacuate the Vimy Ridge, and the battle continued.

While this attack was at its height, on April 16, General Nivelle, in a tempest of wind, rain, and snow, launched his offensives on the Aisne and in Champagne. On the Aisne, while the French troops broke through at many points on the Chemin des Dames, and forced the Germans to withdraw with heavy losses from the Vailly Salient, they were then held up by the strong positions and machine-guns which were encountered behind the first lines. The attack was renewed on April 17 and 18, but no great advantage was gained. In Champagne the heights of Moronvilliers were gained, and on the 19th the German counter-attacks failed to retake them. But, in spite of these successes, according to General Ludendorff, "the crisis of the April battle had been survived," and "by this time our line was once more re-established and consolidated, so that on both fields of this great double battle the new offensive came to grief with heavy loss."

The French casualties up to April 24 amounted to 34,000 killed and 99,281 wounded.

It is easy to appreciate the anxieties which were felt in France while this offensive was in progress. Some members of the Cabinet, many generals in high command, and many powerful critics in the Senate and the Chamber, had held grave doubts as to the wisdom of the operations. On April 18 Sir William Robertson had informed Sir Douglas Haig, that M. Albert Thomas had told Mr. Lloyd George that the French Cabinet was resolved not to face a prolonged struggle, such as that which had taken place on the Somme in 1916, unless the operations in the first few days showed prospects of considerable gains in the near future. And Sir Douglas Haig was invited to express his opinion as to what would happen if the operations of the French armies were soon brought to a close.

Whatever doubts Sir Douglas Haig may have had with regard to General Nivelle's plan, which had been accepted by our Government, he had no doubts that the offensive, once begun, should be continued. Moreover, he thought that the struggle was following a normal course. He therefore wrote in reply :

I consider that the chances of success this year are remarkably good, if we do not relax our efforts, and that it would be neither wise nor sensible, and in the long run would be more costly in men and in money, to suspend offensive operations within a short time. On the contrary, every effort ought to be made to urge all the Allies to do everything in the world now to co-operate in a big offensive, so as to engage the enemy completely and everywhere, as it was agreed to do at the Chantilly Conference.

On April 26 the British Government was assured that the French War Committee had resolved that the operations ought to be continued on their original lines. Nevertheless, doubts and divided counsels still prevailed in the minds of the French Government. On May 4, a formal Allied Conference was held in Paris. This conference was preceded by a meeting between the chief military advisers of the two Governments, who agreed upon the following report, which was drawn up by Sir William Robertson.

" I conferred this morning," wrote Sir William Robertson, " with General Pétain, General Nivelle, and Sir Douglas Haig. Together we reviewed the situation as a whole, including that of Russia and Italy, and the entry of America into the war. We came to the unanimous opinion that it is essential to continue the operations of the offensive on the Western Front. A great part of the reserves of the German Army have already been exhausted by the Franco-British attacks. If we give the enemy time to recover the benefits of this success will be lost. He will be at liberty to attack either Russia or Italy.

" The enemy's objective at present is certainly to encourage the German people to hold out until submarine warfare produces its effects. If we allow him to achieve easy successes where he can, and to proclaim to the world that he has defeated his chief enemy, he will get this result. It might be fatal to our chances of winning the war.

" We are, however, unanimously of opinion that the situation has changed since the French and British Governments agreed upon the plan for the offensive begun in April. This plan is no longer operative. It can no longer be a question of trying to break the enemy front and to reach distant objectives. It is a matter now of using up and exhausting the resistance of the enemy. If this end is reached, and when it has been

reached, the consequences of that fact must be exploited up to the last possible limit.

"At present we are agreed that it is necessary to fight with all our available strength with the object of destroying enemy divisions. We are unanimously of opinion that there is no half measure between this method and a defensive which at this period would amount to a recognition of defeat.

"We are unanimously of opinion that our aim cannot be attained, without attacking ceaselessly with limited objectives. We hope to get our way with the lowest possible losses.

"Having come to unanimous agreement on the above principle, we consider that the methods to be adopted to put them into effect, and the programme and fronts of attack, are matters to be left to the generals responsible, who should immediately examine and solve them."

This appreciation of the position was then discussed at a full meeting of the conference.

According to Major Civrieux, Mr. Lloyd George was the principal speaker in the debate which then followed. And the speech which Major Civrieux quotes is so interesting that we give his extracts in full :

"What we want," said Mr. Lloyd George, "is to be certain that we are in agreement on the general principle of a continued offensive, carried out with all the resources and all the energies of our two armies. We do not need to know the details, which more especially interest those who have direct responsibility for the military operations. We prefer that generals should keep to themselves what regards their executive plans; when they are put down on paper, to be communicated to ministers, the ministers are rarely the only ones to become acquainted with them.

M. PAINLEVÉ: "What Governments have a right to know is the general plan, and the principles which direct the generals' plan of action."

MR. LLOYD GEORGE: "What we do not need to know is the precise spot of the attack, nor its date, nor the numbers of guns and divisions engaged. It is essential that these details should remain secret. In England we do not put these questions. Moreover, General Robertson has not encouraged us to do so. We treat him with the respect he deserves, and refrain from all indiscreet curiosity.

"In the name of the British Government, we declare that we give our assent to the documents we have just heard. But it is important that there should be no doubt as to the interpretation of those documents.

"A limited offensive might mean an offensive carried on by two or three divisions, or a big attack such as that of the British armies before Arras. It is well to insist upon the capital importance of making a great

effort, so as to make as much impression as possible upon our enemies in the course of this war.

" The whole weight of the war is on the shoulders of France and Great Britain. What Russia can do is a mystery; what Italy can, or will do, we know well enough. America is still an unknown quantity, and we must not count upon her military aid for a long time to come. If the war lasts, 500,000 Americans on this side will be useful, but we must live in the meanwhile, and we do not know if we will have next year the necessary tonnage to maintain these large armies brought over from America.

" After having considered the matter with minute care, the British War Cabinet asks its French colleagues to pursue the offensive this year, with the whole strength of the two armies.

" We may be led not to appreciate at their true worth the results of our offensive. No doubt great hopes were raised, which have not yet been fully realised.

" Nevertheless, we have made 45,000 prisoners, the equivalent ot five German divisions, composed of the best troops; we have captured over 450 guns, and over 800 machine-guns, and reconquered an area 200 kilometres square. Suppose that the enemy had obtained this result; that it had made 45,000 prisoners, had captured 450 of our guns, and 800 of our machine-guns, and think of the wave of pessimism which would sweep over public opinion. This shows us the reality of the success we have achieved. We have great difficulties, but we are too inclined to forget those of the enemy. The food problem worries us. That is true also of the enemy, who can expect nothing from America. His only eventual Allies are the Greek Royalists now in Morza. As to material, we have documents which show that the Germans are hampered in their fighting, while we have had more ammunition than we needed for our artillery. The food problem is certainly a serious one for us, but we are not suffering from hunger, and we do not fear hunger in the immediate future.

" Our conclusion is to give the already hardly tried enemy not a minute's rest, until his resistance breaks down. If we stop our offensive, or if we confine ourselves to small demonstrations, the Germans will say: ' We've beaten them: in continuing to sink ships we will starve England, and we will render the continuance of the war impossible.'

" That is why the Allies should use all their strength, without waiting for their ultimate hopes to be realised. Our losses will not only be very grievous, but it is impossible to avoid them, if we are making war. What is wanted is tenacity, endurance. We must not, owing to lack of courage to carry us through, to the last sacrifice, allow victory to escape us.

" Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, with the approval of the Government, is preparing to use all his forces with the object, if not of breaking the enemy, at any rate of inflicting irreparable defeat upon them. It will be useless for him to do this if the French armies do not, at the same time, act with similar energy.

" We want to know that, when the attack is resumed, that it will be

pursued with all the resources and energy of both armies. If you speak of economising human lives, we reply that weak and repeated attacks often cost as much, or more, than attacks driven home."

This speech produced the desired effect. For Major Crivieux tells us that M. Painlevé assured Mr. Lloyd George that he was in complete agreement with him, and concluded by saying, " The battle must continue with all the means and energy in our power."

However, General Nivelle's grandiose scheme had, in fact, already failed. On April 29 General Pétain had been appointed Chief of the Staff with extended powers, a preliminary step, as M. Painlevé admitted in the Chamber on October 10, 1919, to the supersession of General Nivelle, when a suitable opportunity should arise. On May 7 General Nivelle again attacked on the Aisne and in Champagne, and was again repulsed with heavy losses. On May 10 General Nivelle was asked to resign, and on May 15 he was replaced by General Pétain. At the same time General Foch replaced General Pétain as Chief of the Staff. Worse things followed. The collapse of the French offensive, which had been opposed by many highly placed officers, led to a serious loss of *moral* among the French troops, and even to a mutiny in some of the French divisions. But these facts were one of the few well-kept secrets of the war, and were not made known to the Germans for a considerable time.

The first experiment of a unified command had met with no very striking success.

IV

These unfortunate events agitated France throughout 1917 and caused a wave of pessimism to sweep over the country. Only faint echoes, thanks to the censor, were heard on our side of the Channel, and our general public believed that the French offensive had been a great success. On May 10 a secret session of the House of Commons was held, in the course of which Mr. Winston Churchill told an incredulous House that our cause was exposed " to the greatest danger we had been exposed to since the beginning of the war," that we had " seen the greatest depreciation of our chances of victory, yet the public were quite unconscious of this; there was nothing but optimism in the public press." And, after an elaborate review of the military position, which led him to the conclusion that we should under-

take no great offensive until the arrival of the American troops would give us a decisive numerical superiority, he asked the very pointed questions: "Is it true that the French have suffered a great disappointment? Is it true that our offensive has been brought to a standstill?"

It would seem that at this date Mr. Lloyd George could not have been fully informed as to what had really happened in France. For, in traversing the policy of waiting for the arrival of American troops, which had been urged by Mr. Churchill, he gave the most reassuring account of the progress of the offensive.

"I am informed," he said, "that our plans are proceeding with the best hopes. You cannot judge modern battles by weeks. Our military leaders, and those of the French, are satisfied that this battle is proceeding according to their plans. What would have been the effect here if we had had the recent German losses? They have not captured a single gun, while we have captured a considerable number of their 5·9 guns. We have armed 100 merchant vessels with the guns captured at Arras. Neither Sir Douglas Haig nor the Chief of the Staff take Mr. Churchill's view.

"In their judgment the battle is developing favourably.

"In the battle of the Somme the Germans sold ground, they sold villages at very high prices. Therefore, we were not sure that our losses were not heavier than those of the Germans. That is not so in this battle, owing to the heavy German counter-attacks. Our superiority of ammunition is considerable. By hammering, hammering, the time comes when armies crack. Our military leaders feel confident that this is the only strategy by which we can win. There was a period in the Verdun battle when the French generals felt they could not bear the hammering any longer. The French then had a superiority in men, but the Germans in guns, just as we have that superiority now.

"These are the reasons why our military leaders, who met last week, came to the conclusion that the only possible strategy is that which is now being pursued."

It is reasonable to doubt whether secret sessions fulfilled any very useful purpose either here or in France, or whether even a well-informed Sanhedrin is the best instrument for the conduct of a war. In our secret sessions nothing vital was ever revealed. And the only official information which was ever vouchsafed with regard to the first experiment of a unified command, was given on January 20, 1917, on which date the Press Bureau "was authorised to state that there was absolutely no truth in the suggestions that any change was contemplated in the present arrangements as to the relations between the French and British

commands on the Western Front. The subject had not even been discussed."

But throughout the war the members of our Parliament were content to believe where they could not prove, and our good luck, our sea power, and the stubborn valour of the rank and file of our soldiers and sailors never failed us. And it is probable that it was just as well that the House of Commons and the general public knew nothing, until 1919, of the true facts of the French offensive in 1917, or that Sir Douglas Haig had been then subordinated to General Nivelle.

V

The failure on the West destroyed the great expectations which had been held by the Allies at the beginning of 1917. The French armies were unfit for another effort for that year, and for many months the burden on the West was borne by the British armies. A great tactical success at Messines, a repetition of the bloody battles in Flanders, the horrors of the fight for the Paschendaele Ridge, the success at Cambrai, which the German counter-attacks turned into a failure, were all undertaken by Sir Douglas Haig to occupy as many German divisions as possible, in order that General Pétain might nurse the French armies back to their old state of efficiency.

Meanwhile, the Italian offensive on the Isonzo in May had achieved no great success. The Bulgarians had been able to withstand the attacks on their lines in Macedonia. The Russian revolution had upset the Russian plans for the spring, and Korniloff's offensive was delayed until July, by which time the position on the West permitted Ludendorff to transfer six German divisions to the East, and deal effectively with the Russian attacks.

In August the eleventh battle of the Isonzo ended in a great Italian success, so great that it was thought that the Austrian Army would not be able to stand another attack. But, unfortunately, the position on the West had upset all plans and calculations. For when the Russian offensive began the Western Front had weakened. When the Italian advance was made in August and September, Russia had fallen out, and our attacks on the West had almost died away.

Under these circumstances Ludendorff was able to send help to his tottering Austrian Ally. Part of Mackensen's "mass of manœuvre" which had dealt so effectually with Serbia and

Roumania was moved across to deal with Italy, and the state of the Western Front permitted the transfer of six or eight German divisions to assist in the "knock out" blow. On October 24 the Austro-German forces broke through the Italian lines at Caporetto, captured Gorizia on the 27th, occupied the Italian advance base at Udine, and drove the Italian 2nd Army in full retreat before them across the Friulian plains. Further north the Austro-Germans forced the Italian 1st Army to retreat to avoid being cut off. By the middle of November the Italians were holding the Piave Line, the last defence of Venice, and had lost 250,000 prisoners and over 3,000 guns. Eleven British and French divisions were rushed hastily to their assistance, and before the end of December the offensive had come to an end and the Italian Line was more or less stabilised for the winter.

Thus, with a curious resemblance to the years 1915 and 1916, the year 1917 ended in what seemed disaster to the Allies.

VI

It is impossible to avoid wondering what thoughts were passing through Mr. Lloyd George's mind in November and December of 1917. For nearly a year he had held first place and supreme power in our Cabinet. For the same period he had occupied a prominent place in the councils of the Allies. He had secured the fall of men whom he had accused of lack of vision in the conduct of the war. He had conjured up "the mocking spectre" which had taunted them with being ever "too late." Yet his own first experiment of a unified command had resulted in a dismal failure. In spite of his "vision" the military plans of the Allies for 1917 had been shattered. Russia had collapsed and was about to negotiate a separate peace. Roumania was on the eve of signing an armistice. Our forces were scattered in Italy, in Macedonia, in Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia. Ludendorff was free to concentrate his forces for a final blow on the Western Front.

But, whatever may have been Mr. Lloyd George's innermost feelings, we shall find, nevertheless, that he was still able to play the same paradoxical, if consistent, part of the detached and independent critic, which he had played with so much success during the first two years of the war.

The Italian disaster led to an important conference of the Allies at Rapallo in November. This conference decided at once to send reinforcements to strengthen the Italian line. But, in addition, the conference also decided to form a permanent inter-Allied advisory body consisting of two statesmen and one soldier representing each of the Allied countries. On his way home from Rapallo Mr. Lloyd George stopped at Paris, and on November 12 delivered a speech in which he announced the decision which had been reached at Rapallo, and unburdened his soul with regard to the past, present, and future conduct of the war.

In this interesting and illuminating speech Mr. Lloyd George emphasised the need for greater unity of action on the part of the Allies by commenting on what had happened in 1915 and 1916, and what had recently occurred in Russia and in Italy.

(1) *Serbia in* 1915. The enemy was cut off by the Allied Navies from all the rich lands beyond the seas, whence he had been drawing enormous stores of food and material. On the East he was blockaded by Russia. On the West by the armies of France, Britain, and Italy. But the South, the important South, with its gateway to the East, was left to be held by the forces of a small country with half the population of Belgium, its armies exhausted by the struggles of three wars, and with two treacherous kings behind, lying in wait for an opportunity to knife it when it was engaged in defending itself against a mightier foe.

What was the result of this inconceivable blunder? What would any man, whose mind was devoted to the examination of the whole, not merely to one part of the great battle-field, have expected to happen? Exactly what did happen. While we were hammering with the whole of our might at the impenetrable barrier in the West, the Central Powers, feeling confident that we could not break through, threw their weight on that little country, crushed her resistance, opened the gate to the East, and unlocked great stores of corn, cattle, and minerals, yea, unlocked the door of hope —all essential to Germany to sustain her struggle. . . .

Why was this incredible blunder perpetrated? The answer is simple. Because it was no one's business in particular to guard the gates of the Balkans. . . .

It is true we sent forces to Salonika, to rescue Serbia, but, as usual, they were sent too late. They were sent when the mischief was complete.

Half of those forces sent in time—nay, half the men who fell in the futile attempt to break through on the Western Front in September of that year, would have saved the Balkans and completed the blockade of Germany.

(2) *Roumania in* 1916. 1915 was the year of tragedy for Serbia. 1916 was the year of tragedy for Roumania. The story is too fresh in our

memories for me to recapitulate events. What am I to say? I have nothing but to say that it was the Serbian story almost without a variation. It is incredible when you think of the consequences to the Allied cause of the Roumanian defeat. . . .

This could not have happened if there had been some central authority whose responsibility was to think out the problem of war for the whole battle-field. But once again France and England had the whole of their strength engaged in the bloody assaults of the Somme. Italy was fighting for her life on the Carso, Russia was engaged on the Carpathians, and there was no authority whose concern it was to prepare measures in advance for averting the doom of Roumania.

(3) *Russia and Italy.* In 1916 we had the same conference in Paris and the same appearance of preparing one great strategic plan. But when the military power of Russia collapsed in March, what took place? If Europe had been treated as one battle-field you might have thought that when it was clear that a great army which was operating on one flank, could not come up in time, or even come into action at all, there would have been a change in strategy. Not in the least. . . .

This is 1917. What has happened? I wish there had been some variety in the character of the tragedy. But there has been the same disaster due to the same cause. Russia collapsed. Italy was menaced. The business of Russia is to look after her own front. It is the concern of Italy to look after her own war. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Disastrous! Fatal! The Italian Front is just as important to France and Britain as it was to Germany. Germany understood that in time. Unfortunately we did not. . . .

At this moment the extent to which we can prevent this defeat from developing into catastrophe depends upon the promptitude and completeness with which we break with our past, and for the first time realise in action the essential unity of all the Allied Fronts. That is the meaning of this superior Council.

If I am right in my conjectures, then this Council will be given real power, the efforts of the Allies will be co-ordinated, and victory will await valour.

It is doubtful whether this eloquent, if highly coloured, historical retrospect of the war was necessary to justify the formation of the Council upon which the Allies had agreed. But the controversy which subsequently arose with regard to its formation was not made easier by the extreme "Eastern" views to which Mr. Lloyd George had given expression. And many critics were afraid that the Council would be used by him to secure support for an "Eastern" policy, to which it was well known that his own chief military advisers had been and remained entirely opposed.

Nevertheless, the Versailles Council was agreed to with little or no opposition, on the understanding that it was armed only with advisory powers. We know little or nothing of the struggle which then went on behind the scenes. On February 4, 1918, it was suddenly announced that "the functions of the Council itself had been enlarged, and the principles of unity of policy and action initiated at Rapallo in November had received still further concrete and practical development." This presumably meant that the Council had been endowed with executive powers, and another controversy broke out.

The whole subject was then debated in the House of Commons on February 12, but this debate does not add much to our knowledge, either as to what had been effected or what it was intended to effect. Both Mr. Lloyd George in the House of Commons and Lord Curzon in the House of Lords assured their respective audiences that Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson had accepted the proposed arrangement, whatever it was. But four days later, Sir William Robertson was dismissed. And while no details of what had happened, in this short interval, to change agreement into disagreement have ever been made public, there is no doubt that Sir William Robertson was ready to become our military adviser at Versailles, if he was allowed to retain his powers as Chief of the Staff; that he was also ready to be represented at Versailles by an officer subordinated to him; and that he was unwilling to consent to this post being filled by an independent military adviser to the Government, who would be, in effect, superior to himself.

However, soon after Sir William Robertson's dismissal the prospect of a German offensive put an end to the controversy, and all attention was concentrated on the coming battles on the Western Front.

VERSAILLES

CHAPTER XIV

1918

"Owing to the breakdown of Russia the military situation was more favourable to us at New Year 1918 than one could have expected. As in 1914 and 1915, we could think of deciding the war by an attack on land. Numerically we had never been so strong in comparison with our enemies."—*General Ludendorff, "My War Memories."*

I

THE high hopes and the numerical superiority on the Western Front, with which the Allies had looked forward to the coming campaign at the beginning of 1917, had been transferred at the beginning of 1918 to the Central Empires.

General Ludendorff tells us that the idea of making an attack in France had attracted many of their generals as early as November, himself "perhaps most of all." In spite of heavy losses, the German lines on the Western Front had withstood all attacks throughout 1917. The Italian armies had been heavily defeated, and 11 British and French divisions had been sent to Italy to enable the Italians to hold the Piave line. The Russian revolution had destroyed the Russian armies, and made it unnecessary for the German General Staff any longer to maintain all the 80 German divisions (comprising one-third of their total forces) on the Eastern Front. Negotiations with the Russian delegates had been begun in December 1917. An armistice had been at the same time concluded with the Roumanians. Except on the West, German arms had been everywhere triumphant. For although Jerusalem had fallen to General Allenby at the end of 1917, and our troops had advanced beyond Baghdad, these events were of small importance, and could exercise but little influence on the position in Europe. A German victory on the West would settle the fate of all subsidiary enterprises in Asia Minor, and keep Germany's tottering Allies on their feet.

Ludendorff, therefore, determined to succeed where Moltke and Falkenhayn had failed, and to stake the fortunes of his country

on one more attack against "the impenetrable barrier on the West." Accordingly, feverish efforts were made to speed up the "spiritual wrestling match" at Brest Litovsk, and to hasten the "Peace" of Bukarest. Troops began to move from East to West. New offensive tactics were elaborated. All arrangements were rapidly set in motion in order that the attack might take place before the Allies had been reinforced by the arrival of American troops. On February 13, 1918, at Homburg, Ludendorff was able to report to the Emperor that the Army was assembled and well prepared to undertake "the biggest task in history."

It is not difficult to picture to ourselves the anxieties by which Sir Douglas Haig was surrounded when, according to his final despatch, "towards the middle of February 1918 it became evident that the enemy was preparing for a big offensive on the Western Front." Sir William Robertson, with whom he had acted in the closest co-operation for nearly two years, had just been dismissed from his post as Chief of the General Staff, owing to a profound disagreement with his political chiefs with regard to the machinery of the Versailles Executive Council, in whose hands the control of the Allied reserves had been placed. It is probable that Sir Douglas Haig shared some of Sir William Robertson's objections. He knew that Sir William Robertson had very nearly completed negotiations with Generals Foch, Pétain, and himself for a unified command during the coming operations. He must have had grave doubts as to whether an Executive Committee at Versailles would prove, in practice, an efficient substitute for Sir William Robertson's single command. He must also have known that Sir William Robertson had opposed the continuation of offensive operations in Palestine, after the fall of Jerusalem, and that he had tried in vain to induce his Government to withdraw from this theatre the three divisions which were later hurried to the Western Front after the blow had fallen. He must have suspected that Mr. Lloyd George and the War Cabinet felt that the Western Front was sufficiently ensured.

To these troubles was added the fact that our armies in France were suffering from the strain and the heavy losses which had been incurred in the campaigns of 1917. Mr. Neville Chamberlain's recruiting scheme had been a fiasco, had supplied but few drafts to send to France, and had made it impossible for Sir Douglas Haig to keep his existing establishments for 1918 up

to strength. Infantry brigades had, therefore, to be reduced from four battalions to three, which entailed a reduction of some 140 battalions of infantry, and the breaking up of two divisions of cavalry. Thus, although on paper increases in artillery, aircraft, machine-guns and tanks, and additional battalions of coloured and other labourers made the total of our forces greater in January 1918 than it had been in January 1917, by March of 1918 the infantry and cavalry strength of these forces was less by more than 100,000 men.

Moreover, in spite of this reduction in his most important fighting forces, circumstances had compelled Sir Douglas Haig to extend the British line, and take over an additional twenty-eight lines of front from the French between St. Quentin and the Oise. The principle of this extension had been accepted at a conference of the Allies held at Boulogne in September 1917, and the details of its execution had been left to the decision of Sir Douglas Haig and General Pétain. But the intervention of our offensive at Cambrai caused any final decision to be postponed. The matter was discussed by our War Cabinet on October 24, and they came to the conclusion that "the general military policy for next year was then under consideration, and would subsequently form the subject of a conference of the Allied Governments," and under these circumstances they "feared that until this policy was settled, it would be premature to decide finally whether the British Front was to be extended by four divisions or to a greater or less extent than this." In fact, the decision was referred to a future conference of the Allies. In November M. Painlevé's Government fell, and was replaced by that of M. Clemenceau, followed by the Caporetto disaster and the formation of the Versailles Council. M. Clemenceau continued to press for the extension. Both Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson pointed out the military reasons which made it difficult to carry out more than half of the proposed extension and pointed out also that even the lesser extension could only be carried out if the armies in France were brought up to strength. The question was then referred to the Versailles Council for their decision. Under the pressure of these circumstances Sir Douglas Haig met General Pétain, agreed with him to carry out half of the proposed extension by January 10, and expressed a hope that he would be able to carry out the remainder by the end of the month. On January 10 the military representatives of the Versailles Council also met, and recommended a longer extension

than that which had been agreed upon between Sir Douglas Haig and General Pétain, but a shorter extension than that which had been asked for by the French Government, and also suggested certain steps which ought to be taken by the French Army to assist the British if it were attacked, and by the British to assist the French if they were attacked. This recommendation was considered by the full Council on February 1 and was approved by them, subject to a stipulation that any further extension beyond that which had been agreed to by Sir Douglas Haig and General Pétain should be left to the final decision of the two Commanders-in-Chief.

Thus the matter was finally disposed of. The additional twenty-eight miles of front were taken over by Sir Douglas Haig and such preparations as were possible were immediately made to prepare this new line against any possible German offensive.

Apparently up to the last minute our Cabinet was doubtful as to whether Ludendorff would strike on the Western Front.

For whereas Mr. Lloyd George disclosed in a speech on July 24, 1919, that in Sir Henry Wilson's judgment the Germans "were going to concentrate 100 divisions opposite the British Front, and were going to put the whole of their strength into breaking our line on a very wide front in the Cambrai district to the south, in order to sever the French and the British armies. That was his view in January 1918," and that this was "one of the most remarkable predictions in the history of military strategy," Lord Curzon told the House of Lords on April 9, 1918, that "there were some high military authorities who doubted whether they would attack in France at all, and who urged that the concentration on the Western Front was merely a feint, designed to cover some sudden and desperate assault elsewhere."

But soon all doubts were set at rest, and Sir Henry Wilson's prediction came true.

On March 21 sixty-four German divisions attacked the British Front between Arras and St. Quentin, which was held by only nineteen divisions with thirteen in reserve. In twenty-four hours they had broken through on a front of nearly fifty miles, thrown back the 5th Army under General Gough, and involved the 3rd Army, under General Byng, in its retreat. Noyon and Peronne fell. The road to Paris was uncovered. The Germans were soon within 7½ miles of Amiens, and on March 26 it seemed as though the British and French armies might be separated.

History does not yet record whether the Versailles Executive

Committee met during these critical days or whether they made any helpful suggestions. But the point is of small importance. For the great and ominous events which were taking place between March 21 and 26 soon put an end to this short lived body, and settled the vexed question of the control of the Allied reserves on other lines.

II

So grave was the position created by the first successes of the German offensive that on Sunday, March 24, Lord Milner went out on a special mission to France—a mission which in two days produced decisive results.

Ludendorff's great blow on March 21 had been struck at the junction of the British and French armies south of St. Quentin, and at that part of our front which, it will be remembered, had been taken over by our 5th Army under General Gough in January 1918, and which was thinly held with one division only to every 6,750 yards. When Lord Milner arrived in France the 5th Army had almost ceased to exist as an effective force, and had been placed by Sir Douglas Haig under General Pétain's orders. The Germans were pushing their way rapidly towards Amiens, through the gap south of the Somme, and were widening the breach which they had made by further attacks against the British on the north-west and against the French on the south-west. Their object was, of course, to capture Amiens and thus separate the British and French armies. For south of Amiens the Somme broadens into a wide river with few bridges, and the capture of Amiens would sever communications between the two armies.

It was obvious, therefore, that every effort had to be made to stop the German advance and save Amiens.

General Pétain had already thrown in six of his divisions which he had kept in reserve to reinforce the British right, and these were heavily engaged in the districts of Noyon, Roye, and Nestle. He was preparing also to bring round nine additional divisions, some from the north and some from the south, to meet the German advance from Montdidier and Montreuil. But while he was doubtful if he could spare more, inasmuch as he was exposed to the risk of German attacks from Noyon, south of the Oise, and to a German advance in the region of Rheims, it was

equally doubtful if these nine divisions would be sufficient to hold the line.

Sir Douglas Haig was exposed to the danger of a German attack on Arras. He had already denuded his line to a dangerous extent, and was doubtful if he could maintain his front beyond Braye-sur-Somme. He was therefore unable to cover Amiens unless General Pétain came to his assistance and protected his right flank. In fact, as has been so well expressed by a writer in the "Times History of the War," the British army always instinctively wanted to "dress by the left," and so guard the Channel ports, whereas the French army wished to "dress by the right," and so bar the road to Paris.

Every one was agreed that it was vital to save Amiens. Every one was agreed that reserves must be thrown into the breach. Every one was agreed that risks must be taken, that it was impossible to be safe on every part of the Allied Front, and that the line must be weakened in some places in order that it might be strong at the decisive point. But, somehow, it had to be decided whether the necessary reserves were to be taken from the forces of Sir Douglas Haig or from those of General Pétain.

On Monday, March 25, the suggestion had been made that this decision should be left to M. Clemenceau, a proposal which was soon rejected as impracticable. A better solution was found on the following day.

Many pictures have commemorated many great and moving events which occurred during the Great War. It is to be hoped that some artist will one day paint the scene of the Conference which took place on Tuesday, March 26, 1918, at Doullens, a little town within six miles of Amiens, and which decided to place General Foch in supreme command of the Allied Forces on the Western Front.

We content ourselves by giving the bare facts :

M. Poincaré presided over a gathering which comprised Lord Milner, M. Clemenceau, Generals Pétain, Foch, Wilson, and Sir Douglas Haig. After some discussion, and after Lord Milner had had a word apart with Sir Douglas Haig and M. Clemenceau with General Pétain, M. Clemenceau drafted the following resolution :

> Le Général Foch est chargé par les gouvernements britanniques et français de coordonner l'action des armées britanniques et français sur le front ouest. Il s'entendra à cet effet avec les deux généraux-en-chef qui sont invités à lui fournier tous les renseignments nécessaires.

(General Foch is charged by the British and French Governments to co-ordinate the action of the British and French armies on the Western Front. He will come to an arrangement to this effect with the two Commanders-in-Chief, who are requested to furnish him with all the necessary information.)

Sir Douglas Haig suggested that General Foch's powers should be extended so as to include the other armies on the Western Front, a suggestion which was at once adopted. This amendment was made, and the formula then ran as follows :

Le Général Foch est chargé par les gouvernements britanniques et français de coordonner l'action des armées alliés sur le front ouest. Il s'entendra à cet effet avec les deux généraux-en-chef qui sont invités à lui fournir tous les renseignements nécessaires.

DOULLENS, *le 26 mars 1918.*

(General Foch is charged by the British and French Governments to co-ordinate the action of the Allied armies on the Western Front. He will come to arrangements to this effect with the two Commanders-in-Chief who are requested to furnish him with all the necessary information.

DOULLENS, *March 26, 1918.*)

This was approved practically without discussion. The document was signed by Lord Milner and M. Clemenceau, and the conference came to an end.

General Foch at once proceeded to exercise the powers which had been thus conferred upon him. General Pétain's reserves were thrown into the breach and stayed the German advance. On April 4 the German 2nd Army and the right wing of the 18th Army attacked at Albert and south of the Somme, made their last effort to reach Amiens, and failed. "It was an established fact," writes General Ludendorff, "that the enemy's resistance was beyond our strength. . . . Strategically we had not achieved what the events of the 23rd, 24th, and 25th had encouraged us to hope for."

Nevertheless, the Germans had won a great victory, and were free to continue the offensive by concentrating the bulk of their forces either against the British or the French on other parts of the line.

III

Mr. Lloyd George, in a speech at Edinburgh on May 24, 1918, described the position by which we were faced when the German

offensive had begun as "a race between General Hindenburg and President Wilson," in which "the Germans were straining every muscle to reach the goal ere American help should be available for the Allies." He acted with both courage and determination. Throwing all false pride on one side, he caused President Wilson to be informed of the grave if not the desperate plight to which the Allies might be reduced—one of the bravest things which was done by any statesman during the whole course of the war. With great generosity President Wilson responded to the appeal and allowed the American army to be broken up and its battalions brigaded with British and French units. And just as General Foch was running risks on some parts of the Allied line in France in order to be strong at the most essential points, so Mr. Lloyd George ran great risks on the "home front" and concentrated all our shipping on hastening the arrival of American troops. Three divisions were at once withdrawn from Palestine to the Western Front, and within a month 350,000 men had been sent from home to reinforce our armies in France.

On April 9 Mr. Lloyd George introduced a Bill for the raising of the military age, and for extending conscription to Ireland. It is probable that the latter proposal was not intended seriously, and was only made in order to facilitate the parliamentary passage of the former. It is probable also that Mr. Lloyd George realised that the success of the German offensive had made everyone a "Westerner," and that he was conscious that he was himself suspected of having weakened our forces in the West for the benefit of the East. For in the course of his speech he dealt very shortly with the question of the numbers of our army on the Western Front.

"What was the position," he said, "at the beginning of the battle? Notwithstanding the heavy casualties in 1917 the Army in France was considerably stronger on January 1, 1918, than on January 1, 1917.

"Up to the end of 1917—up to, say, about October or November—the German combatant strength in France was as two to the Allied three. Then came the military collapse of Russia, and the Germans hurried up their released divisions from the Eastern Front, and brought them to the West. They had a certain measure of Austrian support which has been accorded to them. Owing to the growth of the strength of our armies in 1917, when this battle began, the combatant strength of the whole of the German army on the Western Front was only, approximately, though not quite, equal to the total combatant strength of the Allies. In infantry they were slightly inferior, in artillery they were inferior, in cavalry

they were considerably inferior, and, what is very important, they were undoubtedly inferior in aircraft. . . .

"There is another matter to which I should like to refer, and it is the suggestion that our forces have been dissipated on subsidiary enterprises. Not a single division was sent from France to the East. With regard to Italy, had it not been for the fact that there are Italian, French, and British divisions there, the Austrian Army would have been free to throw the whole of its strength on the Western Front, and if there were not some there now the Austrian Army would be more powerfully represented than it is on the Western Front.

"With regard to Salonika, the only thing the present Government did was to reduce the forces there by two divisions.

"In Mesopotamia there is only one white division, and in Egypt and Palestine together there are only three white divisions, and the rest are either Indians or mixed with a very small proportion of British troops in those divisions. I am referring to infantry divisions."

In the House of Lords, on the same day, Lord Curzon was able to assure the "Westerners" that "so far from our forces at Salonika having been increased, it was a matter of common knowledge that they had been considerably reduced for the sake of the Western Front." An assurance which was, unfortunately, only partially true, inasmuch as two divisions had been taken away from the Salonika forces, but had been sent to Palestine and not to the Western Front.

As news gradually became available, efforts were made in the House of Commons to ascertain the circumstances under which the 5th Army had been obliged to take over their additional twenty-eight miles of front. On April 23 the following questions were asked and answered.

MR. GEORGE LAMBERT asked whether the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Bonar Law) could offer the House any explanation of the failure of the 5th Army to hold the line of the Somme, and whether this portion of the line was taken over by British troops contrary to the judgment of Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig.

MR. BONAR LAW: I cannot at present make any statement in regard to the first part of the question. There is not the smallest justification for the suggestion that this portion of the line was taken over contrary to the judgment of Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig. The arrangements in the matter were made entirely by the British and French military authorities.

MR. LAMBERT: Was this part of the line taken over after the War

Cabinet had ordered it to be taken over and therefore the objections of Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig were overruled?

MR. BONAR LAW: The answer I have given is an answer to that suggestion. The suggestion is absolutely without foundation.

COLONEL BURN: Did not the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces at the time make a protest owing to the short number of the divisions at his disposal against taking an extra line from the French?

MR. BONAR LAW: I am quite glad this matter should be cleared up. To the best of my knowledge, and I think I know all the facts, there is not the smallest truth in any such suggestion. Naturally, with two armies, there has been difference of opinion as to the extent of line that should be taken over by each. Representations often occurred between the two Governments on the subject, but they were always left to the military authorities to decide. Of course, if they had not agreed the decision would have had to be taken by the two Governments, but such an occasion did not arise.

MR. LAMBERT: Did Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig make any objection at the time to the taking over of the line?

MR. BONAR LAW: The answer I have given is a reply to that. Obviously, both the British Government and the French Government might have taken different views as to the proper allocation of the forces. Such differences, as I say, were always left to be decided by the military authorities. If that had not occurred then, of course, the Governments would have taken the final decision. But the need of such a decision did not arise.

MR. PRINGLE: Was this matter referred to the Versailles Council at any time?

MR. BONAR LAW: The particular matter was not dealt with at all by the Versailles Council.

These explanations ended the matter for the time being. But in a short while the whole question of the strength of our Army in France, and the extension of our line, was raised again in quite an unexpected manner.

On May 7 the following letter appeared in nearly all the daily papers:

SIR,

My attention has been called to answers given in the House of Commons on April 23, by Mr. Bonar Law to questions put by Mr. G. Lambert, Colonel Burn, and Mr. Pringle as to the extension of the British front in France ("Hansard," vol. 105, No. 34, p. 815). These answers contain certain misstatements which in sum give a totally misleading impression of what occurred. This is not the place to enter into a discussion as to all the facts, but Hansard's report of the incident concludes:

MR. PRINGLE: Was this matter entered into at the Versailles War Council at any time?

MR. BONAR LAW: This particular matter was not dealt with at all by the Versailles War Council.

I was at Versailles when the question was decided by the Supreme War Council to whom it had been preferred.

This is the latest of a series of misstatements which have been made recently in the House of Commons by the present Government.

On May 9 the Prime Minister said:

"What was the position at the beginning of the battle? Notwithstanding the heavy casualties in 1917 the Army in France was considerably stronger on January 1, 1918, than on January 1, 1917" ("Hansard," vol. 104, No. 24, p. 1328).

That statement implies that Sir Douglas Haig's fighting strength on the eve of the great battle which began on March 21 had not been diminished.

That is not correct.

Again in the same speech the Prime Minister said:

"In Mesopotamia there is only one white division at all, and in Egypt and in Palestine there are only three white divisions; the rest are either Indians or mixed with a very small proportion of British troops in those divisions—I am referring to the infantry divisions" ("Ibid.," p. 1327).

That is not correct.

Now, sir, this letter is not the result of a military conspiracy. It has been seen by no soldier. I am by descent and connection as sincere a democrat as the Prime Minister, and the last thing I desire is to see the government of our country in the hands of soldiers.

My reasons for taking the very grave step of writing this letter are that the statements quoted above are known by a large number of soldiers to be incorrect, and this knowledge is breeding such distrust of the Government as can only end in impairing the splendid *moral* of our troops at a time when everything possible should be done to raise it.

I have therefore decided, fully realising the consequences to myself, that my duty as a citizen must override my duty as a soldier, and I ask you to publish this letter in the hope that Parliament may see fit to order an investigation into the statements I have made.

I am, Sir,

Yours faithfully,

F. MAURICE,

Major-General.

20, Kensington Park Gardens,
May 6, 1918.

It is probable that, at first, only a few of those who read this letter realised that the signature "F. Maurice" disclosed the identity of Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, the youngest

Major-General and one of the most brilliant of the younger school of officers in the Army, whose services in France in the first days of the war had earned him the post of Director of Military Operations, which he had filled since December 1915, and which he was then on the point of exchanging for another military position in France.

The circumstances which induced General Maurice to write this letter, and, with his eyes open as to the consequences, to sacrifice so promising a military career, are well known, although they have never been published. He had seen the Government fail, as he thought, to deal seriously with the question of manpower during 1917, and to supply Sir Douglas Haig with the new drafts for which he had pressed. He had seen the continuance of an offensive policy and the retention of divisions in Palestine which he thought to be wrong. He had seen the formation of the Versailles Council result in the dismissal of his old chief, Sir William Robertson, and in the control of military operations by a mixed Committee which he also thought to be wrong. He had seen the British Front extended under the circumstances which we have related. On April 13 his duties had taken him to France, and during his visit he had heard many comments made on Mr. Lloyd George's speech of April 9 by men who felt, possibly quite wrongly, that this speech sought to blame them for misfortunes which they attributed to the policy pursued by the Government. Moved by all these considerations, moved also by the feeling that Mr. Lloyd George's policy had almost invited disaster, and by the fact that a formal written complaint, addressed to his immediate chief, Sir Henry Wilson, the new Chief of the Staff, had elicited no reply, General Maurice wrote and published his celebrated letter.

The sensation produced by its publication was great and immediate. It stirred up the feelings which had been excited by the dismissal of Sir William Robertson in February; it revived the bitter memories of the political crisis in December 1916 which had resulted in the fall of Mr. Asquith; it caused many men to think that Mr. Lloyd George's brilliant gifts had caused him to disregard the more sober judgment of his military advisers; it created a first-class political crisis, and it ended by dividing and shattering a great political party.

On Tuesday, May 8, Mr. Asquith asked Mr. Bonar Law—

Whether the attention of the Government had been called to a letter in the press from Major-General Sir F. Maurice, lately Director of Military

Operations, in which the correctness was impugned of several statements of fact made by Ministers to the House, and what steps the Government proposed to take to enable the House to examine those allegations.

To which Mr. Bonar Law replied as follows :

General Maurice's letter raises two questions: the question of military discipline involved in the writing of such a letter, and the question of the veracity of ministerial statements. As regards the first question, that is being dealt with by the Army Council in the ordinary way. As regards the second question, though it must be obvious to the House that Government could not be carried on if an inquiry into the conduct of Ministers should be considered necessary whenever their action is challenged by a servant of the Government, who has occupied a position of the highest confidence, yet, inasmuch as these allegations affect the honour of Ministers, the Government propose to invite two of His Majesty's judges to act as a Court of Honour to inquire into the charge of misstatements alleged to have been made by Ministers and to report as quickly as possible.

Mr. Asquith replied by tabling a motion asking for the appointment of a select Committee " to inquire into the allegations of incorrectness in certain statements of Ministers of the Crown to this House contained in a letter of Major-General Maurice, late Director of Military Operations, published in the press on the 7th day of May."

For two days public opinion was with Mr. Asquith and General Maurice. On May 8 the " Times " supported the proposal for an inquiry by two judges in strong and critical terms :

" No one suspects," wrote their leader-writer, " Mr. Bonar Law's native honesty, but it would not be the first time that his parliamentary answers had been misinformed . . . .

" But the essential point for the public, of course, is this point-blank expert denial of the truth of ministerial statements. That is a challenge, coming from such a quarter, which no Government can afford to ignore or merely to rebut. Unless and until it is impartially investigated and disproved, it will profoundly shake the public confidence in every statement made from the Treasury Bench. . . .

" What is really involved is the whole series of bygone struggles over the provision of more recruits, . . . over the proper use by the Army of such man-power as the country has already provided, over the establishment of the Versailles Council, and finally of the single command, over what, in short, may be called the Allied as against the insular view. These are matters on which there are acute and honest differences of opinion among soldiers as well as civilians, but they can never be settled, and they

can only be aggravated by a parliamentary wrangle at the very crisis of the war.

"Least of all can they be settled by any *ex parte* statement, however apparently convincing, from the Prime Minister himself. Mr. Lloyd George should be under no illusions whatever on that point. . . .

"For all we know, he may have an equally unanswerable case against General Maurice's charges.

"But the inevitable restrictions of a speech on military dispositions, the growing distrust of all official statements (whether by generals or by ministers) and his own incurable habit of protesting too much—all this makes it hopeless that there should be an end of this controversy except through an entirely disinterested inquiry."

Nevertheless, between May 8 and May 10 the Government decided to withdraw their proposal for an inquiry by two judges and to rely entirely on an *ex parte* statement by Mr. Lloyd George.

It would be of little profit to recall memories of this debate or to attempt to analyse the statement then made by Mr. Lloyd George, or to ask whether that statement was true by the letter and false by the card. On the smaller point with regard to the number of white troops in Egypt and Palestine, General Maurice was admittedly correct. With regard to the numbers of the British Army in France and the extension of the British line, our readers must form their own "Court of Honour" and pass the necessary judgment. We have given them the facts to enable them to do so.

Mr. Asquith was able to rally only ninety-nine Liberals in the division lobby in favour of his motion. The remainder of his party either voted with the Government or abstained from voting at all. The war had destroyed the Liberal Imperialists, and broken the Liberal Party into fragments.

General Maurice was, of course, at once dealt with by the military authorities and forthwith placed on retired pay. And it is instructive to compare the failure of his intervention in May 1918 with the more successful political excursion of Lord French in May 1915, which we have discussed in an earlier chapter. Both men were distinguished public servants debarred by convention and practice from criticising the executive under which they served. Both men thought that the policy of the executive was leading us to disaster. Both men were ready and willing to risk their careers if only they were able to effect a change in the policy which they regarded as fatal. But, whereas General Maurice acted openly, co-operated with no

politicians, sought no political support, appealed only to the public and to the House of Commons to inquire into certain specified facts, Lord French acted in secret, secured in Mr. Lloyd George the support of a member of the Cabinet which he wished to destroy, and in Mr. Bonar Law the powerful influence of the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons. It is, therefore, not a matter for surprise that whereas the executive was no longer able to retain the services of General Maurice, Lord French, created a viscount, endowed with £50,000 of public money, was allowed to exchange a brilliant military for an equally useful political career. In politics, as in war, victory goes to the best tactician and to the superior strategist. In politics, as in life, rewards are reaped and prizes are won by the strong; the weak must ever content themselves with a lesser inheritance.

IV

Meanwhile the German offensive continued. On April 9 Ludendorff celebrated his birthday by attacking our forces in the plain of the Lys between Armentières and La Bassée. At first this attack promised well. The sector held by the Portuguese gave way. Armentières fell, the Messines ridge was captured, and at one time it seemed as though our armies might be confined to a space in which they would find it impossible to manœuvre and compelled to stand a fight with their backs to the sea, or to abandon the Channel ports and retreat down to the south of the Somme in order to keep their connection with the French. Fortunately, although Mount Kemmel was taken on April 25, this contingency did not arise. French reserves were thrown in by General Foch to strengthen our line, and by the end of the month our front was stabilised.

Foiled in Flanders on May 27 a sudden attack was launched against the French. The positions on the Chemin des Dames were captured in a few hours. Soissons and Château-Thierry fell. The railways from Paris to Nancy and the road from Paris to Amiens were cut. Paris itself was in danger. But again the Germans were able to win a great and not a decisive success. On July 15 the last effort to reach Paris was made. While the armies of the Crown Prince were thrown against General Gouraud's forces east of Rheims, the German 7th Army crossed the Marne. General Gouraud withdrew to his second positions, held the

German attacks, and on the following day the offensive was definitely broken. Ludendorff had shot his bolt. The measure of the successes which he had won between March and July were also the measure of the exhaustion of his armies. Time and the United States of America were on the side of the Allies. By the end of July there were nearly a million American troops in France.

On July 18 General Foch assumed the offensive. By the middle of September the whole of the Western Front was ablaze; victory followed victory with monotonous regularity, and the *moral* of the German armies was broken. On October 5 the German Chancellor appealed to President Wilson for an armistice. For a few weeks Europe was reminded that the balance of the world had shifted West, while President Wilson carried on his negotiations in public. On November 11, at 5 a.m., the armistice was signed. The long nightmare of the war had come to an end at last.

And the vast majority of a grateful nation, forgetting their own efforts, their own ready sacrifices, their own heavy losses, their own steadfast faith in the justice of their cause, their own stubborn confidence in the ultimate victory, joined, almost with one accord, in acclaiming Mr. Lloyd George as the man who had won the war.

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Printed by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ld., London and Aylesbury.

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